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LOVE AND ROCKETS || CAPITALISM VS. DEMOCRACY

CONNIE SCHULTZ

GABRIEL WINANT

THE Nation.

Meet the Boy Scouts of the Border Patrol

The agency's Explorers program offers young people training and mentorship—with a side of Trumpian ideology

Morley Musick



The Force of Nonviolence
The Ethical in the Political
By Judith Butler

Renowned thinker Judith Butler argues for an ethic of nonviolence that must be connected to a broader political struggle for social equality.



All-American Nativism
How the Bipartisan War on Immigrants Explains Politics as We Know It
By Daniel Denvir

"As Daniel Denvir's exceptional book shows, the history of US immigration politics is central to understanding how our many crises have converged in this moment." —Naomi Klein, author of *No Is Not Enough*

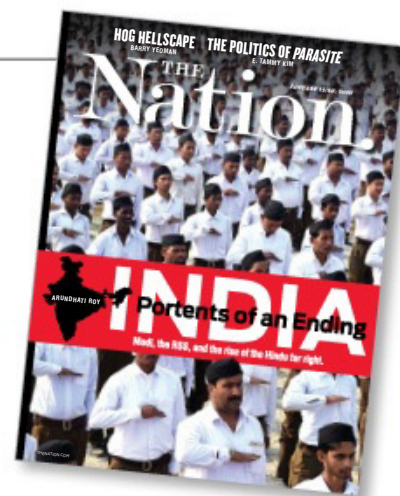
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Letters

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Hog Hell

I read "Raising a Stink" by Barry Yeoman in the January 13/20 issue with intense interest. Yogi Berra could have told me it was "déjà vu all over again." Or perhaps "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

In 1998 the American Planning Association published my monograph research report on concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs. In *Planning and Zoning for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations*, I detailed the challenges for local governments in using land-use ordinances to manage the impacts of huge hog-, poultry-, and beef-raising operations. Odors were clearly an issue, along with manure runoff producing water pollution and other factors. Among the obstacles were state laws exempting farms from zoning rules—still a major impediment to better environmental management in Iowa. But I was also struck at the time by the special role of major hog producer and North Carolina state Senator James Murphy in shaping the eastern North Carolina legal environment Yeoman describes.

Not long after, Hurricane Floyd displayed the folly of the existing approach by shattering many such operations and spreading hundreds of thousands of animal carcasses across the region's watersheds, triggering a public health crisis. In 2018, Hurricane Florence made clear that threat has not disappeared.

In Iowa and Nebraska, the CAFOs are surrounded by white neighbors and farmers, and the same complaints and similar lawsuits often surface. This puts the lie to the claim by North Carolina producers that African American neighbors have targeted their operations for a phony environmental justice agenda. When it stinks, it stinks. Worse, we now have a federal government

that is withdrawing from the playing field. There is no solution left but to change the lawmakers themselves.

JAMES C. SCHWAB
CHICAGO

Barry Yeoman's article does a service by painting the impossibility of living a good life within range of the stench from CAFO pig farming. But he gives us only half the story. The pigs that produce that stench are not so much perpetrators as victims. The craze for bulk efficiency in modern agriculture has moved us from a situation in which farmers raise some hogs alongside other ventures to the industrial CAFOs of today, which house 14,000 swine in a dozen maximum-security hellholes.

Never seeing the light of day, never being able to root and wallow, spending their brief existence excreting lagoons full of what their human neighbors are choking on, sows bred to exhaustion in gestation crates with only metal bars to chew on in frustration—their lives are filled with misery.

And they are incredibly vulnerable to disasters. It's estimated that 5,500 imprisoned pigs drowned in North Carolina during Hurricane Florence in 2018. That's up from the 2,800 that succumbed to Hurricane Matthew in 2016.

Pigs are smarter than dogs. It's a shame they're also tastier.

PEGGY CORBIN
BEND, ORE.

In Praise of Powerful Words

I read Arundhati Roy's extraordinary piece "India: Portents of an Ending" [January 13/20] over two nights. The next morning, I woke with it clear in my mind and with tears in my eyes. Roy educated me on her country's history and current plight. And she wrote a prayer for her home. I will pray with her.

CATHERINE MALARA
POMONA, N.Y.

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The Way Out

“You, the American people, should be extremely grateful and happy,” Donald Trump announced the morning after Iran launched missiles at two US bases in Iraq after the assassination of Iran’s top general. “No Americans were harmed in last night’s attack.”

In Trump’s madcap presidency, even his efforts at deescalation threaten to give peace a bad name, as previously exemplified by his betrayal of the Kurds in an aborted attempt to remove US troops from Syria. Now his capricious use of the military exposes once more the folly of our misadventures in the Middle East. Progressives—and a reinvigorated peace movement—must take the lead in demanding an end to this decades-long debacle.

Trump is like the spoiled, delinquent teenager you would never trust with the keys to your car. Sadly, a minority of Americans managed to give him the keys to the White House—and the US military. He exhibits all the hallmarks of petulant adolescence: revolt against authority, juvenile posturing, thoughtless risk-taking, and trying to cover his crack-ups by lying, blaming others, and tweeting tantrums.

Trump’s ignorance is exacerbated by his conflicting instincts. He scorns the failed foreign policy establishment yet surrounds himself with its most bellicose outliers. He wants to end wars without losing them, to order military strikes without provoking a response. He thinks America can stand alone and wants allies to clean up his messes. He seeks credit for ending the wars in the Middle East while dispatching an additional 17,500 troops to the region. The results are whiplash-inducing reversals and chaos.

His incoherent speech the morning after Iran’s missiles struck reveals just how daft this approach is. He pledged that Iran would never develop nuclear weapons yet offered no clue how he would fulfill that promise. Indeed, rather than seek negotiations, he promised even more “punishing economic sanctions,” ratcheting up the tensions in the region.

At the same time, he intimated that we don’t have to be there at all: US energy independence means “we do not need Middle East oil,” that new “options” there have become “available.” He invit-

ed our allies to get more involved in the region but neglected to note that German Chancellor Angela Merkel was already headed to Russia to meet with Vladimir Putin and coordinate efforts to defuse tensions. He opined that the destruction of ISIS was good for Iran and that we should “work together on this and other shared priorities,” without mentioning that he had just assassinated the man who led the Iranian effort against ISIS.

Meanwhile, on the ground, the debacle deepens. The Iraqi parliament voted to demand the withdrawal of all US forces, and the American military suspended its training efforts and active campaigns against ISIS in Syria and Iraq in favor of protecting its troops, turning them from troops into targets.

Not surprisingly, the president outrages the mandarins of the US foreign policy establishment and the career officials of the national security apparatus. They scold him for undermining our allies and weakening the US global order. The House impeachment hearings featured professionals offended by Trump’s corruption of our foreign policy for his political purposes.

This tempts the Democrats—ever defensive about appearing weak on national security—to become the establishment’s defenders. Democratic presidential candidates Joe Biden and Pete Buttigieg criticize Trump not for the illegal assassination of a foreign official in the capital of an ally but for procedural offenses—for failing to consult Congress or inform allies. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi named Representative Elissa Slotkin, a former CIA and Pentagon analyst, to lead the debate on a war powers resolution that would require Congress to be consulted before further war with Iran. Significantly, Pelosi chose Slotkin over Representative Barbara Lee, the only legislator to understand the



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Cover illustration: Ross MacDonald



BY THE
NUMBERS

1.2B

Metric tons of greenhouse gases emitted by the US military since 2001—roughly equivalent to the annual output of 257 million passenger cars, according to Brown University's Costs of War Project

77–80%

Percentage of US government energy consumption for which the military is responsible

47th

The US military's ranking, if it were a country, among greenhouse gas emitters, based on its fuel usage alone—ahead of Sweden, Portugal, and Denmark

4–8

Miles per gallon of diesel fuel for the Army's 55,000 Humvees

80

Number of countries across six continents in which the US is engaged in counterterrorism operations

dangers of the military blank check given to George W. Bush after 9/11 and vote against it.

This posture is simple folly. The foreign policy establishment, Democratic and Republican alike, is deeply committed to policing the world, to a generational commitment to remaking the Middle East, and to a renewed Cold War with Russia and China. Trump's follies extend their failures.

Progressive Democrats must champion another course. This is the moment when Democrats should take up Trump's broken promise to pull our troops out of the Middle East, and they must also curb the terrifying powers of any president, Republican or Democratic, to order an assassination at whim. Poll after poll shows that most Americans—including most Republicans—say they want US troops out of the Middle East.

The war powers resolution passed by the House is a good first step in this direction, a clear statement of Congress reasserting its powers. If Tim Kaine's concurrent resolution passes in the Senate, it would force a presidential veto. Meanwhile, Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Ro Khanna have been joined by dozens of lawmakers in both houses in a No War Against Iran bill that would prohibit the use of funds in such a war without congressional approval. In an election year, getting lawmakers on the record will help elevate the issue in 2020 campaigns.

The public also would also benefit from the modern equivalent of the Fulbright hearings, the widely televised hearings in the 1960s and '70s that exposed the catastrophe in Vietnam, which were led by a Democratic senator and initially challenged a Democratic president. Sadly, the gelded Republican Senate caucus shows no signs of that leadership. And it is difficult for the House Foreign Affairs Committee to play a similar role, given the clown show that the Republican minority guarantees.

Trump's serial fiascos have exposed the reality of his presidency: He's not going to win the wars in the Middle East, and he's not going to end them, either. He's simply going to waste more lives and more resources attempting not to lose them—or worse, provoke a far worse conflagration with Iran. Trump has betrayed one of the few sensible statements that he made in his presidency: that “great nations do not fight endless wars.” Now progressives must ensure that Democrats are committed to leading the way out. **ROBERT L. BOROSAGE FOR THE NATION**

Love and Rockets

How I met my husband opposing the Iraq War—and why I worry the press will repeat its prewar mistakes.

In the weeks leading up to the Iraq War, I was a columnist at the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* who opposed it. An Ohio congressman I'd never met, Sherrod Brown, had cast his vote against it.

Every marriage has a story about its beginnings. This is ours.

One of our early dating habits was to share our hate mail on Fridays. Most of it was about our opposition to

the war. We were regularly called traitors. Some people were willing to sign their names to letters demanding our deaths. Being hated by the same kind of people can help a couple bond. We married in April 2004.

Sherrod was hardly alone in his opposition to the war; 156 members of Congress voted against it. But as *Washington Post* columnist Margaret Sullivan recently noted, few journalists ever mention this. I share her concern that journalists may have failed to learn from our mistakes in the early coverage of that war.

In 2003, virtually every newspaper endorsed the war, and journalists reported as fact the false claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. This was an unchallenged lie pitched by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell, who has since professed remorse. Many journalists later expressed regret for falling for it. But our profession is shrinking, and I worry that our collective memory is, too.

On January 3, Donald Trump ordered a US drone strike that killed Iran's Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani. The ensuing swirl of political punditry and Trump's continued erratic behavior give me a sinking feeling that we are about to repeat our worst mistakes.

In a brief televised speech from the White House on January 8, Trump vowed to the nation, “The United States is ready to embrace peace with all who seek it.”

“We must all work together toward making a deal with Iran that makes the world a safer and more peaceful place,” he said. “We must also make a deal that allows Iran to thrive and prosper and take advantage of its enormous untapped potential.”

He took no questions from the press.

By now, we all should have known what was coming, as Trump was scheduled to be at a rally in Toledo the next day. His die-hard supporters showed up, and their guy delivered.

The crowd cheered as Trump repeatedly brayed about killing Suleimani: “He was a bad guy. He was a blood-thirsty terror, and he's no longer a terror. He's dead.”

Trump complained that he hadn't won the Nobel Peace Prize. He called Democratic members of Congress “vicious, horrible people,” mocked Representative Adam Schiff's appearance—“you little pencil neck”—and derided House Speaker Nancy Pelosi as “not operating with a full deck.” Trump also claimed that if he'd alerted Democrats to the planned attack, they would have leaked it to the press.

The mob booed in solidarity. “That's a lot of corruption back there, folks,” he said, pointing to the media pool in the arena. “Very, very dishonest people...a tremendous number...like I have never seen in my life before.”

Reporter Liz Skalka of the *Toledo Blade* was there and tweeted, “There's a very loud attendee next to the press pen, who just turned around to address the media during Trump tirade, and shouted: ‘You fake ass motherf*ckers. You suck. Do your jobs!’ So that's how tonight is going.”

Just days earlier, Pete Hegseth, a weekend host of *Fox and Friends*, said, “I bemoan the fact, especially even since the Iraq War, that it feels like patriotism is

(continued on page 8)

COMMENT

Q&A GABRIEL ZUCMAN

For the past few decades, the Democratic Party has ceded the tax debate to the GOP by failing to put forward a truly progressive vision for taxation. According to

economists Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman in their new book, *The Triumph of Injustice*, the result is a country with a plutocratic tax system.

The authors find that the top 1 percent earn nearly twice as much of the share of the national income as the bottom 50 percent. This reality is why one of the main battles emerging in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party has focused on the best way to tax the rich. Saez and Zucman, both professors at the University of California, Berkeley, are at the center of this debate, having advised presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren on their tax plans.

I spoke to Zucman about his book and how to fix our unjust tax system. —Clio Chang

CC: Conventional wisdom states that the US tax system is generally progressive. Your book argues otherwise. Can you explain how you and Saez came to this conclusion?

GZ: What we did was measure all taxes paid at all levels of government: federal, state, and local. What we found is that pretty much all income groups pay around 28 percent of their income in taxes. The working class pays less, at around 25 percent; the middle class pays more, at around 28 percent; and the upper middle

class a bit more but without much variation, except at the very, very top. When you look at billionaires, or at the top 400 richest Americans, the tax rate falls to 23 percent, so they have a lower rate than all other income groups.

CC: Tell me briefly about the alternative tax system you propose in your book.

GZ: There are a number of components to it. One is to fix the corporate tax. If you have a low rate like the current 21 percent, you cannot have a well-functioning progressive income tax. If you have too big a gap between corporate tax rates and the top individual rates, the wealthy incorporate and earn income through corporations taxed at 21 percent, thus avoiding the progressive income tax.

So a key component of our plan is that we have to fix and increase the corporate tax rate. In the current system, they can avoid it by booking profits abroad in low- or zero-tax places like the Cayman Islands. Our plan essentially says if someone books profits abroad, the profits are going to be taxed in the US. For instance, if a US company books \$1 billion in profits in Ireland, which taxes that at 2 percent, and the US rate is 35 percent, then the US would collect the missing 33 percent

on the \$1 billion. If you do that, you remove any incentive for companies to book taxes in low-tax countries. Once you fix the corporate tax, you can then have a more progressive income tax.

CC: You also argue that income taxes should be used to reduce inequality.

GZ: It's a very American idea. We tell the story in the book of the famous speech by [Franklin] Roosevelt in 1942 when he goes to Congress and says, "Look, I think nobody should have an income, after paying taxes, of more than \$25,000"—at the time, which is equivalent to \$1 million today—"therefore I propose a 100 percent top marginal income tax rate on income above \$25,000." And of course, with a 100 percent tax rate, the idea is not to collect revenue—the point is obviously to regulate inequality and to reduce the concentration of pretax income.

Before Reagan, the market for tax avoidance and evasion services was considered repellent.

CC: One of the main arguments of the book is that tax avoidance and evasion by the extremely wealthy is not a fact of life but a policy choice.

GZ: The choice to tolerate tax avoidance, tax evasion, tax competition—it's a political choice. The turning point was [Ronald] Reagan. When he gave the speech that "government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem," it legitimized the industry that helps people avoid taxation. Before Reagan, that industry—the market for tax avoidance and evasion services—was considered repellent. If there's a political will to make progressive taxation work, the industry can be regulated. ■



CALIFORNIA

Good Intentions

California's poorly worded Assembly Bill 5, a law intended to rein in huge companies like Uber and Lyft, went into effect on January 1. The statute has a good intent: to protect gig workers by reclassifying them as employees entitled to benefits rather than as independent contractors. But AB 5 will affect self-employed people across the economic spectrum. For example, it limits freelance writers to 35 contributions per year to any one publication, thus putting at risk weekly columnists, bloggers, and cartoonists.

Many groups with powerful lobbies behind them, such as doctors, managed to carve out exemptions to the law, and Uber is largely refusing to cooperate with it, banking on the company's ability to overturn it via a ballot initiative later this year. But many other less-represented groups did not get exemptions. They now find themselves on the wrong end of AB 5 and are looking to the courts for legal relief.

On New Year's Eve, independent truckers secured an emergency temporary restraining order so they could keep driving in the state. But a judge in Los Angeles refused to issue a similar order on behalf of freelance writers and photographers. So unless another court rules on their behalf, thousands of writers and artists in California (disclosure: including myself) could end up turning down work so as not to run afoul of these regulations. As a result, this ill-considered law will end up economically harming huge numbers of freelance and self-employed workers.

—Sasha Abramsky



Eric Alterman



Where Power Lies

When the media treats GOP falsehoods as a matter of taste, it endangers our democracy.

Nothing is more important to the survival of a democracy than the ability of its citizens to distinguish between fact and fiction. Not surprisingly, this is exactly where Donald Trump and other Republicans have waged their war. Yet amid an avalanche of lies from the president and his allies, the most influential members of the mainstream media are taking refuge in a poisonous version of both-sides-ism that treats truth as a matter of taste, as if the evidence presented by the witnesses in the House impeachment proceedings were of equal value to the absurd outbursts of Trump's supporters. But as *New York Times* columnist Michelle Goldberg observed, "Trump's weaponized disinformation" is proving "corrosive to democracy" regardless of its target, because it has eroded "the political salience of reality."

Among the most egregious offenders in this journalistic malpractice is the country's most important media institution: Goldberg's own *New York Times*. Its reporters have repeatedly failed to draw distinctions between one side's lies and the other's facts. This happened in the wake of the Mueller report on Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election when, in a front-page article, reporters Peter Baker and Nicholas Fandos explained, "In an era of deep polarization, Mr. Mueller's 448-page report quickly became yet another case study in the disparate realities of American politics as each camp interpreted it through its own lens and sought to weaponize it against the other side." Nowhere in this piece did the reporters mention that only the Democrats' version of events relied on evidence.

Unfortunately, the *Times*' impeachment coverage has doubled down on its commitment to false equivalence. White House correspondent Michael D. Shear wrote a Page 1 article that described "the different impeachment realities that the two parties are living in," without hinting that only one party's version was conspiratorial nonsense. Media scholar Jay Rosen noticed 12 instances in which this one article failed to differentiate Republican falsehoods from what all reasonable observers—including the entire US intelligence community—acknowledge as facts. (The phrase "both sides" made four appearances in the piece.) Instead, the contest between truth and lies was posed as a war metaphor ("both

sides engaged in a kind of mutually assured destruction"), a childish spat ("They called each other liars and demagogues and accused each other of being desperate and unfair"), and a natural consequence of epistemological disagreement ("The two parties could not even agree on a basic set of facts in front of them"). Shear treated *Times* readers to Republican lies without any context indicating that the GOP's fictional narratives could not be trusted. And regrettably, the article was not an outlier. In another analysis, Baker described the drama of impeachment as playing out in a world where "conspiracy theories are everywhere and conspiracy theorists are in the White House and Congress" while neglecting to point to a single conspiracy theory that did not emanate from the Republican side of the aisle. This willingness to play Republican patsy has turned America's most important news source into a willing participant in Trump's war on truth.

Baker embraced another Republican talking point: that the impeachment is bad entertainment and therefore not terribly important. Unlike Bill Clinton's December 1998 impeachment, which, Baker wrote, "felt like the ultimate drama, so intense that the rest of the world seemed to have stopped spinning on its axis," the Trump version inspires "less suspense" and has "an outcome seemingly foreordained." Never mind that the stakes of selling out the national interest to a foreign power and demanding that another leader interfere in our democracy for personal political gain dwarfs the significance of lying about consensual sex. Judging Trump's impeachment as if it were a reality TV program was just another Republican trap into which too many journalists eagerly jumped. Writing for Reuters, Jeff Mason and Patricia Zengerle began their coverage of the House impeachment hearings by writing, "Democratic lawmakers tried their hand at reality television with mixed results on Wednesday as they presented arguments to the American public for the impeachment of a former



In preparation for his Senate trial, Trump has showered cash contributions on the same Republican senators who will be on his jury.

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Clearly, the right wing's endless campaign to work the refs continues to pay dividends in the mainstream media.

star of the genre, Donald Trump. Unlike the best reality TV shows—not to mention the Trump presidency itself—fireworks and explosive moments were scarce, however.” The reporters then quoted a tweet from none other than Eric Trump, who complained, “This is horribly boring.” NBC’s Jonathan Allen was another person who felt that the proper prism to analyze the constitutional questions raised during the nation’s third-ever impeachment was show business. He lamented, “The first round felt more like the dress rehearsal for a serious one-act play than the opening night of a hit Broadway musical.”

Another weakness in the coverage of Trump’s impeachment—and an ironic one, given that the question of his guilt turns on an alleged quid pro quo—is the willingness of most members of the media to ignore the acts of bribery that Trump is deploying to get himself off the hook. Too few outlets have pointed out that, in preparation for his Senate trial, Trump has showered

cash contributions on the same Republican senators who will be on his jury. According to Richard Painter, the chief White House ethics lawyer under President George W. Bush, these contributions constitute “felony bribery” by the president. “Any other American who offered cash to the jury before a trial would go to prison,” he wrote on Twitter. “Any senator who accepts cash from @realDonaldTrump before the impeachment trial is guilty of accepting a bribe and should go to the slammer.”

Clearly, the right wing’s endless campaign to work the refs continues to pay dividends in the mainstream media. This combines with a commitment to an outdated conception of objectivity that remains agnostic on the issue of truth, as well as a desperate desire to entertain. What is lost in this devil’s bargain is the reason we have a First Amendment to begin with: to empower citizens to hold the powerful—in this case, the most powerful person on the planet—to account. ■

(continued from page 4)

largely dead amongst our journalism corps. Where is the home team for a lot of these people? Taking a moment to cheer and appreciate that when America kills one of

our enemies on the battlefield, that’s a good thing. It just doesn’t feel like that exists much anymore.”

This is the Republican plan, again. Call into question the patriotism of any journal-

ist willing to question this administration about what it’s doing to this country.

Hegseth, a military veteran, was 22 years old when we invaded Iraq. I was 45, and I took notes. After Trump’s rally, I reread a collection of my columns from that time. What a jarring reminder of the cost of that unjustified war.

In a single week in 2005, Cleveland lost 14 Marines. Twenty-three-year-old Augie Schroeder was one of them. He arrived in Iraq full of good intentions, his parents told me at the time, but after 26 weeks in the field, his enthusiasm had eroded. His father, Paul Schroeder, said he would never forget what his son told him in his final phone call from Iraq: “The closer we are to departure, the less worth it this has become.”

By early 2005, polls showed that most Americans opposed the war. The next year, both houses of Congress flipped to the Democrats.

Fourteen years later, here we are again.

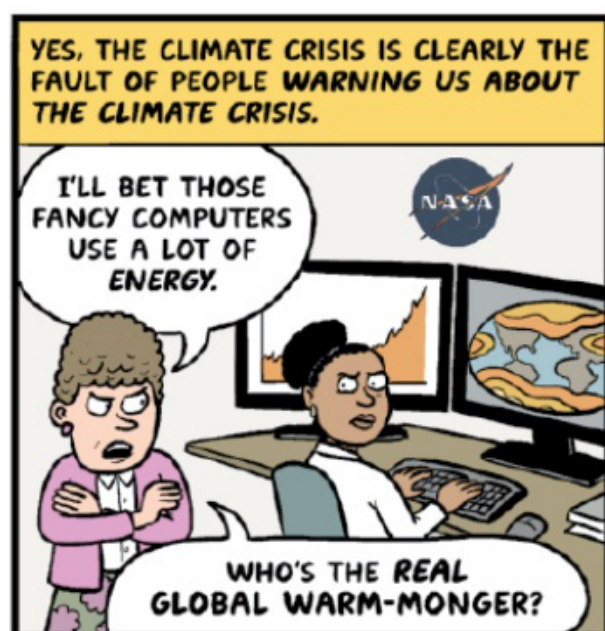
Trump and his personal cheerleading squad at Fox News will continue to do all they can to fuel distrust and hatred of us, but no serious journalist gets into this profession to be popular. It is our job—our patriotic duty—to hold to account our government and the people who run it.

If we do this well, perhaps we can avoid the mistakes of that early coverage of the Iraq War. And give our fellow citizens the chance to be the patriots this country needs. Nothing scares Donald Trump more than informed Americans. **CONNIE SCHULTZ**

Connie Schultz is a Pulitzer Prize-winning syndicated columnist in Cleveland. Her debut novel, *The Daughters of Erietown*, comes out June 9.

COMIX NATION

JEN SORENSEN





COLOMBIA

LOOKING FORWARD/LOOKING BACK

AUGUST 13–24, 2020

Colombia is truly a special destination, one that was sadly off-limits to travelers for many decades. Now proudly welcoming visitors, Colombians are passionate about sharing their spectacularly beautiful landscapes and rich cultural treasures. This once-divided country has been undergoing a historic transformation since the landmark peace deal of 2016. The flawed yet hopeful peace accord marked the important beginning of a long process, yet today the country finds itself once again at a crossroads as it charts its way forward.

We'll look deeply into the complicated politics of Colombia and meet some of the heroic people working hard for the fair implementation of the peace plan. Join us as we travel to Bogotá, Medellín, Cartagena, and gorgeous small towns we will encounter throughout the countryside, as we meet with historians, human-rights workers, government officials, academics, documentarians, artists, and others who continue the process of helping to shape the new Colombia.

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IRAN

Economic Warfare

Commentators portrayed President Donald Trump's brief January 8 speech on Iran as an attempt to dial back tensions at a moment when the threat of war loomed large. Trump, who ordered the drone strike that killed Iranian Quds Force commander Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani, did not answer Iran's retaliatory attack on US bases in Iraq with a missile attack of his own. Also, amid his usual bombast, Trump sent signals that, as *USA Today* observed, "appeared to offer the Iranians an olive branch, signaling the United States does not seek a war with Tehran."

Lots of attention has been paid to his declaration that "the United States is ready to embrace peace with all who seek it." Yet Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN) immediately recognized a fundamental flaw in the president's response. In his speech, Trump announced, "As we continue to evaluate options in response to Iranian aggression, the United States will immediately impose additional punishing economic sanctions on the Iranian regime. These powerful sanctions will remain until Iran changes its behavior."

To that, Omar replied, "This makes no sense. Sanctions are economic warfare. They have already caused medical shortages and countless deaths in Iran. You cannot claim to want deescalation and then announce new sanctions with no clear goal. This is not a measured response!" —John Nichols

Iran: Back to the Future?

Trump's actions against Iran show how little the political class has learned about war.

Despite long lines on the weekends, the port of entry in Blaine, Washington, is ordinarily a quiet border crossing. Its most memorable feature is the Peace Arch, a monument honoring the friendship between the United States and Canada that has become a popular spot for Instagram photos.

This month, however, it was a site for the mass detention and questioning of Iranian Americans. As many as 200 travelers who were returning to the United States were held by Customs and Border Protection agents in Blaine and asked for details about their families in Iran, their parents' military service, and their social media accounts. The incident appears to be one of the first domestic consequences of the Trump administration's decision to assassinate Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani.

The killing of Suleimani, Iran's most senior security and intelligence official, has essentially plunged the United States into another calamitous war. A diplomatic resolution to the 40 years of conflict between the two countries seemed possible in 2015, when the Obama administration negotiated the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, easing economic sanctions on Iran in return for meaningful limits on its nuclear program. But when Donald Trump pulled out of the deal in 2018, tensions between the two nations started to rise, culminating in the US drone strike that killed Suleimani just outside Baghdad International Airport in Iraq.

Anyone who lived through the early 2000s will recognize the early signs of a massive foreign policy debacle, and this past month bore all of them. The administration fumbled repeatedly as it tried to justify the assassination. Trump announced, in his usual bombastic style, that the Iranian general was the No. 1 terrorist in the world, responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Americans. Vice President Mike Pence tweeted that Suleimani arranged the travel of "10 of the 12 terrorists" who carried out the attacks on 9/11. (In fact, there were 19 hijackers, all of whom had sworn allegiance to Al Qaeda, a Sunni terrorist organization that views Shias like Suleimani as heretics.) Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared that Suleimani was planning "imminent" attacks against the United States,

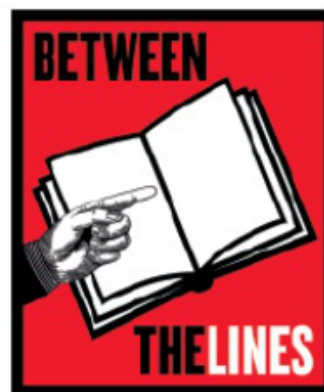
before redefining the word to mean "this was gonna happen."

With few exceptions, Republicans immediately rallied around Trump, repeating his claims that American diplomats and military personnel were under immediate threat and lambasting anyone who expressed skepticism as a traitor to the United States. This would be farcical were it not so dangerous. Republican legislators seem to think war with Iran would be a brief and easily winnable conflict in which indeterminate bad guys will die and everyone else will be safe and go on peacefully with their lives. But war is not tidy, and it isn't fought on the battlefield only. It can affect civilians near and far, including hundreds of millions of people who had no say in this conflict.

We've heard this all before, back in 2001 and 2003. Remember Dick Cheney's promise that American troops would be greeted as "liberators"? Remember Donald Rumsfeld's prediction that the war in Iraq would last "five days or five weeks or five

months"? Yet here we are. The disastrous invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have taught the political class only one thing: that there are no legal, professional, or even social consequences for leading the country into war, for torture and extrajudicial killings and indefinite detention, for sending troops to die by the thousands, for wrecking other countries and killing, wounding, or displacing millions of civilians. These days, George W. Bush paints dogs and hangs out with Ellen DeGeneres and Michelle Obama. Rumsfeld released a game app. Condoleezza Rice and John Yoo hold faculty positions at prestigious universities. David Frum writes cover stories for *The Atlantic*. Joe Biden is running for president. The list goes on and on.

Those who warn about the dangers of war, on the other hand, face a different reaction. When Representative Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) announced that legislators at a classified security



Anyone who lived through the early 2000s will recognize the early signs of a massive foreign policy debacle.

briefing on Iran had not been shown any evidence of an imminent threat, she was attacked by Representative John Rutherford (R-FL), who wrote on Twitter, “You and your squad of Ayatollah sympathizers are spreading propaganda that divides our nation and strengthens our enemies.” Similarly, when Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN) said that the events in Iran had given her post-traumatic stress disorder, Representative Jim Banks (R-IN) responded that her statement was “a disgrace and offensive to our nation’s veterans who really do have PTSD after putting their life on the line to keep America safe.”

This juvenile understanding of patriotism must stop. Given the lives at stake, Jayapal has every right to treat US intelligence with seriousness and skepticism. Nor are Omar’s traumatic experiences as a refugee any less real than those of troops on the battlefield. Jayapal and Omar are doing their country a great service by refusing

to accept the administration’s claims in the absence of compelling evidence.

It’s important to keep in mind that Trump faces an election in less than a year and the Iranian regime is dealing with popular protests at home. So tensions between the two governments are not likely to abate soon. War with Iran will affect hundreds of millions of Americans, Iranians, Iraqis, and others. It will shatter the lives of troops and civilians. It will cost American taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, even as they are denied universal health care and relief from student debt. And it will exacerbate global warming. The time to raise questions is now.

As we’ve seen with Afghanistan and Iraq, the architects of the war with Iran will not be the ones paying the price. Instead, that cost will be borne by service members and civilians, some of whom—like the travelers in Blaine, Washington—will pay it here at home. ■

As we’ve seen with Afghanistan and Iraq, the architects of the war with Iran will not be the ones paying the price.

SNAPSHOT / PEDRO ALEJANDRO GRANADILLO HERNANDEZ

On Shaky Ground

A collapsed home sits tilted after a 6.4-magnitude earthquake hit Guánica, Puerto Rico, on January 7, 2020—the biggest in a century. Since December 28, 2019, the island has experienced more than 500 quakes, which have left nearly 5,000 people homeless.

Calvin Trillin
Deadline Poet

TRUMP’S THREATS TO THE IRANIANS

He said we would target their cultural sites.

The next day, he had much less surety.

Still, thinking of what might be culture to him,

They’re beefing up golf course security.





Meet ^{the} Boy Scouts of the Border Patrol

The agency's
Explorers program
offers young
people training
and mentorship—
with a side of
Trumpian ideology.

Morely Musick



The Nation.

THE US BORDER PATROL'S COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS CAN VERGE ON THE MACABRE. FOR INSTANCE, AGENTS AT THE AJO STATION in Arizona, who patrol the Sonoran Desert for undocumented migrants, ran a Teddy Bear Patrol in 2004, passing out stuffed animals to small children. They did this while arresting immigrants trying to join their children after crossing the border.

Border Patrol Explorers, the agency's program for 14-to-20-year-olds, offers an equally stark double standard: Young people, many of them first-generation Mexican Americans or the US-born children of undocumented immigrants, learn survival skills, first aid, and participate in training exercises in which they play Border Patrol agents or the people they target. Some will inadvertently retrace the path their undocumented parents took across the Sonoran Desert, pretending to get arrested or make arrests.

Operating in southern border communities throughout Arizona, California, and Texas as well as the northern parts of Maine, Michigan, and Washington, the Border Patrol Explorers program offers a taste of law enforcement work to young people interested in a career in security, policing, or the military. Run in conjunction with Learning for Life, an affiliate of the Boy Scouts of America, Border Patrol Explorers promises to teach young people life skills by preparing them, among other things, to arrest drug runners and undocumented immigrants. Various levels of law enforcement, from local sheriffs to the military, run their own Explorer programs.

I first came across Border Patrol Explorers in December 2018 while living in Ajo, an unincorporated former mining town in the Sonoran Desert. About 40 miles from the US-Mexico border, Ajo (population: approximately 3,300) is built around a Spanish Colonial Revival-style plaza and an enormous, inactive open pit mine streaked with teal and red from its oxidized copper. There's a compound of Border Patrol homes north of the mine.

A former company town run by a revolving cast of businesses that constructed and once enforced segregated neighborhoods for its white, Mexican, and Native American workers, Ajo is now an important migrant crossing area with a complicated history. It is also, fittingly, the home of Scott Warren, an activist with the immigrant advocacy group No More Deaths who was arrested more than two years ago after giving water and shelter to two stranded migrants. (He was acquitted of felony charges late last year.)

I moved to Ajo after the family separation crisis of 2018. I wanted to understand the residents' responses to President Trump's deployment of the military to the border, and given the public outcry over the separated families, I was particularly curious to find out how young people understood what was going on. Many Ajo High School students commute from Mexico each day, and it's not uncommon for families in town to have relatives on both sides of the border and drive across it frequently. One day, in the town's central plaza, I encountered two freshmen on their lunch break who were chatting in Spanish on a bench.

The boys told me about their hobbies, their skateboards, and what they wanted to do when they grew up: join the Border Patrol. Then one of their friends came over and mentioned that he was in Border Patrol Explorers. When I asked what that was, he opened up his phone and showed me a video of himself wearing safety earmuffs and a green uniform, firing a rifle into the desert. As I watched his body shake in the video from the weapon's recoil, he looked up at me with a proud smile.

I SPENT THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS TRYING TO understand why this program existed and what its participants thought about it. But it was difficult to find any detailed information about the organization.

Apart from the sympathetic coverage of the Explorers by local TV stations and newspapers—limited mainly to the announcement of graduations, and com-

The Explorers program promises to teach young people life skills by preparing them to arrest undocumented immigrants.

Abolish ICE:

Crowds protest the separation of immigrant families in June 2018 at the Metropolitan Detention Center in downtown Los Angeles.

munity service days—little has been written about the program. US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Boy Scouts of America were hardly forthcoming; I contacted the Boy Scouts' press office three times and various Border Patrol offices too many times to count, as well as the heads of Explorer posts, or units, in Arizona, California, and Texas. I was eventually given information about the program's history and permitted to interview an agent in Maine, but I was never allowed to see a training session.

The Border Patrol's press office in Arizona cited a personnel shortage and offered to schedule an appointment for me to sit in on a training period at a later date, but it dropped the ball after numerous further requests. I was eventually invited to attend meetings with Explorer posts in Laredo, Texas, and Douglas, Arizona—only to be turned away at the last minute from both. In Laredo, I arrived at the station and could see Explorers doing push-ups in the parking lot. That's about as far as I got before I was told to leave.

Instead, I managed to interview four trainees, all of them boys (the girl Explorers I met declined to speak on the record.) I also interviewed Mark Phillips, a Border Patrol agent who started an Explorers post in Houlton, Maine. In addition, I obtained organization documents through a Freedom of Information Act request. The



interviews and documents paint a picture of an organization similar to the youth outreach programs run by local police departments, except that the community-building and maturity exercises are focused on learning how to track and arrest people, including undocumented migrants.

The Explorers' first post came into existence in 1984, thanks to the efforts of Border Patrol agent Gerald Tisdale to teach youths in Texas the duties and responsibilities of Border Patrol Agents. A former Boy Scout, he immediately forged connections with the local scouting council, which helped oversee the first group of 10 recruits in Laredo. Four years later, he was invited to Washington, DC, to help establish a national program. After its initial expansion to four posts in 1987, the Explorers grew to 45 posts by 2018, with 960 members in all.

In a telephone interview, Phillips detailed his experiences advising an Explorer post. He began his work with the CBP after serving in the military and established his post in Houlton in 2017. He said that running the youth group is one of the best parts of his job and that it is as an important public service experience as much as a preparation for the Border Patrol in particular. He spoke quickly and enthusiastically about his post's members, two of whom, he said, were able to administer crucial first aid to a man who was attacked by a rabid dog, using techniques they learned in the program.

Phillips explained that the Learning for Life program provides the initial training for agents interested in starting their own posts. It also issues broad guidelines regarding how the troops should be managed and then leaves the day-to-day management to these local agents. Each post requires participants to attend a basic law-enforcement academy, often in intensive sessions during the summer. According to a CBP press officer, the 60 hours spent in the Basic Explorer Academy instructs the teenage students in physical fitness, CPR, drills, and conducting vehicle stops. It also offers courses in radio communications, public speaking, report writing, and "ethics and integrity" and introduces the youths to criminal, juvenile, immigration, and Fourth Amendment law. Finally, the budding Explorers learn the history of the Border Patrol, along with the nuts and bolts of how the agency operates.

When it comes to patrolling, the techniques they learn vary by geography. In Maine, Phillips said, Explorers can receive training in operating the radar systems of Border Patrol boats. Explorers in Arizona practice footprint tracking suited to work in the desert. Many troops also receive training in firearm use, at

times in outings sponsored by the National Rifle Association. Arrest and deportation trainings are standardized for posts across the country.

Each post pays for its own equipment, trips, and uniforms through fundraising. The troop in Houlton harvests vegetables for local food pantries and solicits donations in return. According to Nathaniel Madero, a 22-year-old Explorer alum from Douglas, Arizona, who joined when he was 14, his group paid for hiking trips by selling spent bullet casings they gathered after their firearm training sessions—like a bake sale but with weapons instead of brownies.

THE FIRST IN-DEPTH CONVERSATION I HAD WITH an Explorer took place two months after I started researching the group. He is Alexis Fabian, and he was a senior in high school. I had contacted him via Facebook after finding his name on the Border Patrol Explorers page for Yuma, Arizona. His profile pictures show a slight, proud-looking boy in an Explorers uniform, climbing rocks as part of an exercise.

Fabian, now 18, joined the Explorers at age 14. He had encountered recruiters at a local fair in Yuma, and later, his father's friend encouraged him to join. (Agents often recruit Explorers at border town fairs, sometimes dressing as Agent Fino, the Border Patrol's larger-than-life inflatable mascot.) In Yuma, Fabian said, advisers would take them to the levy where the Colorado River crosses the border, pointing out how men fishing there might be scouts helping to ferry migrants from Mexico. In the surrounding desert and in the Yuma Border Patrol station, his post would act out various enforcement scenarios.

"We would sometimes act as the agents," Fabian said, "or we would be the illegals.... [The agents] would tell us who we were going to be, give us a little background on our life, and then we would act it out." The supervisors would tell the Explorers playing "bad guys"—drug cartel members or armed immigrants—when the scenario involved a shooting, then encourage them to catch the border agents off guard.

Photos from the Yuma and Tuscon Explorer pages on Facebook show the trainees peering from behind CBP trucks or hiding behind creosote bushes and pointing mock weapons at suspects in the distance. Videos show them training in the desert or jumping out from behind dry brush to make an arrest. They run in formation, weaving in and out of cover, seeming to treat the desert like the set of a wartime thriller. Fabian recalled that he and his peers would shout "Bang! Bang!" to indicate when they were shooting someone. Other groups of Explorers carry airsoft guns that shoot plastic pellets and layer several T-shirts to protect their chests.

Fabian explained why his post would practice shooting. "Sometimes [undocumented immigrants] are not compliant when we find them," he said. "They paid all this money to get here to start another life. They're not just going to give up when they see us. Some would fight back. Some would be compliant. Maybe they try to kill you or threaten you. Sometimes they pick up an element—a rock lying around, anything. Anything can be used to kill you."

"We would sometimes act as the agents, or we would be the illegals. [They'd] give us a little background on our life, and we would act it out."

—Alexis Fabian

Up in the air:

A Boy Scout is thrown in a blanket toss at a 1953 scouting jamboree in Irvine Ranch, California.



He added that the Explorers are always instructed not to shoot to kill but rather to disarm immigrants and protect agents.

Another common scenario would involve simulating high-risk vehicle stops at Border Patrol checkpoints, which are scattered across Arizona's highways. In these exercises, the Yuma Explorers would sit in parked cars, pretending to be migrants, while other Explorers interrogated them through the window. The aspiring agents were supposed to project "officer presence," or an air of authority, as they attempt to untangle the lies of the migrants, Fabian said.

While role-playing as a migrant, he said, he would often encourage other Explorers to be more authoritative. "If the Explorer didn't have officer presence, if they looked nervous, I would be rude to them," he added. "If they stuttered with their questions to me when they're supposed to be the ones with power, I would be rude or wouldn't talk."

Along with the other Explorers I spoke with, Fabian said that learning officer presence was an important part of his development as a person; it taught him confidence. That this confidence comes from wielding power over one's friends, who are role-playing as immigrants, in a program co-run by a national law-enforcement agency, is a fitting reminder of the increasingly xenophobic ideologies embraced and spread by the nation's highest office.

Other activities teach even more life lessons. The Chandler Tactical Competition in Arizona brings together Explorer troops from different levels of law enforcement across the Southwest to compete in challenges ranging from crisis negotiation to raiding marijuana fields (in which the teens traverse booby-trap-laden fields wearing combat gear).

A YouTube video produced by the Chandler Police Department features scenes from the 2017 competition. Opening with a faux MPAA advisory reading that the video is "rated R" for "some strong, intelligent participants throughout," it has a James Bond theme. Actor Daniel Craig points his gun at the camera, and Judi Dench looks on as a building explodes; an overhead shot, presumably taken by drone, pans across lines of young Explorers carrying firearms, and a bomb made from Coca-Cola cans and a cell phone displays an incoming call with Arabic script. One teen mock-shoots another teen point-blank. Early frames read, "You cadets & explorers, bring out your inner Bond. Starring you as Bond 007."

IF THERE'S SOMETHING OVERTLY THEATRICAL, EVEN campy, about these recruitment efforts, that isn't a coincidence. The age-old children's games of cowboys and Indians or cops and robbers have simply been harnessed for a modern, state-run, militarized equivalent: border guards and immigrants.

The city of Douglas, Arizona, even saw a collabora-



Pledging allegiance: Customs and Border Protection Explorers at a 2015 ceremony.

tion between the local Explorers troop and the Douglas High School Drama Club in 2015 after high school actors agreed to play criminals to help raise the emotional stakes of their training.

The theater kids recalled enjoying playing school shooters, armed robbers, and domestic abusers. They were so affecting in their performances, according to former theater club member Nelva Valenzuela, that one of the Explorers told her that the participant "almost cried" during a training exercise. In some exercises, her fellow actors got so caught up in their roles that they began to defeat the mock agents. They eluded arrest with elaborate dialogue and tricks, leading the Border Patrol agent to remind them to "let Border Patrol win."

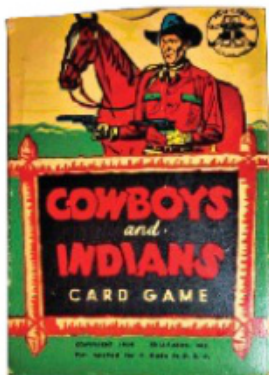
That's what tends to happen in real life, too, in no small part thanks to recent obstacles imposed by the Trump administration that make it exceedingly difficult for anyone to seek asylum—from categorizing victims of domestic violence as ineligible to requiring individuals traveling from countries south of Mexico to seek shelter along the way first.

Children are taught the basics of these laws in Basic Explorer Academy, Phillips said. One of the main parts of the law curriculum, he added, involves clarifying the distinction between defensive and affirmative asylum processes. A defensive process, per the government, is one that migrants initiate in order to avoid being deported—say, after being arrested for crossing the border without the right documents or on suspicion of committing some other crime. An affirmative process for asylum in the US is one started without removal proceedings or any other kind of legal charges hanging over the migrants' heads.

To Phillips, the difference between the two generally boils down to criminals (defensive claimers) and noncriminals (affirmative claimers). "Should those two [kinds of] people be treated the same, or should they be treated differently?" he asks.

But it's not that simple. A major reason most asylum *(continued on page 26)*

The Trump administration has made it exceedingly difficult for anyone to seek asylum.



Child's play: Border agents and immigrants are the new cowboys and Indians.



***Mr. President,
We have some Bad News
and some Good News...***

The BAD News is you
LOST!

The GOOD News is you
WON!

Trump could lose by many millions of votes and still secure an Electoral College win—and Democrats aren't paying this the attention it deserves. JOHN NICHOLS



LIZABETH WARREN ELECTRIFIED A DECEMBER TOWN HALL MEETING IN IOWA WHEN SHE ANSWERED A QUESTION ABOUT THE Electoral College with a stirring call to action. “I want to get rid of it,” she declared. “My goal is to get elected and then to be the last American president to be elected by the Electoral College. I want [my] second term to be that I got elected by direct vote. I’m ready!”

Warren may be ready, and her critique throughout the current campaign—“Call me old-fashioned, but I think the person who gets the most votes should win”—is right. But for the most part, Democrats have been slow to recognize the immediate and long-term challenges they face when it comes to the Electoral College.

They’re good at griping about the 18th century construct that has cost their party the presidency twice since 2000, but they lack a sense of urgency when it comes to addressing this barrier not just to their own electoral prospects but also to democracy itself. That lack of urgency could give Donald Trump a second term that’s every bit as undeserved as his first.

“I believe whoever the [Democrats nominate] is going to win by 4 to 5 million popular votes. There’s no question in my mind that people who stayed home, who sat on the bench, they’re going to pour out,” said the filmmaker Michael Moore, a Michigan native who has been a blunt, sometimes unsettling truth teller on the state-based dynamics of presidential voting, in an interview on *Democracy Now!* in December. “The problem is...if the vote were today, I believe [Trump] would win the [states] that he would need.”

That’s a chilling prospect for Democrats, who have not gotten over the fact that their party’s 2016 nominee, Hillary Clinton, won the popular vote by nearly 2.9 million ballots and yet narrowly lost three states that have traditionally voted Democratic—Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania—and with them the presidency.

Moore’s assessment is a sound one, but we should begin by recognizing that he may actually be underestimating the antidemocratic potential of the Electoral College. *The New York Times*’ Nate Cohn ran the numbers and determined “it is even possible that Mr. Trump could win while losing the national vote by as much as five percentage points.” This suggests the prospect that Trump could go into the election trailing his 2020 Democratic opponent by a wide margin in the polls, lose the actual vote by 6 million or even almost 8 million votes, and still serve a second term.

FOR PERSPECTIVE, CONSIDER THIS: THE 2020 Democratic nominee could beat Trump by a wider popular-vote margin than that enjoyed by Barack Obama in 2012 or George W. Bush in 2004 and still lose. “That’s because the major Democratic opportunity—to mobilize nonwhite and young voters on the periphery of politics—would disproportionately help Democrats in diverse, often noncompetitive states,” explains Cohn. “The major Republican opportunity—to mobilize less educated white voters, particularly those who voted in 2016 but sat out 2018—would disproportionately help them in white, working-class areas overrepresented in the Northern battleground states.”

Even if the Democrats manage to do better this year,

“Call me old-fashioned, but I just think the person who gets the most votes should win.”

—Elizabeth Warren

The Cook Political Report’s David Wasserman warns of an “ultimate nightmare scenario” in which their presidential candidate wins the popular vote and “converts Michigan and Pennsylvania back to blue. But Trump wins re-election by two Electoral votes by barely hanging onto Arizona, Florida, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Maine’s 2nd Congressional District—one of the whitest and least college-educated districts in the country.”

For Democrats, however, that would just be the start of the nightmare. Because it is biased toward small states that tend to favor Republicans and undervalues large coastal states where Democrats run well, the Electoral College is resistant to demographic shifts that should favor the Democrats. No matter how small a state’s population, it gets at least three electoral votes—two for its senators and one for its House member—out of a fixed total of 538. In 2016, Trump carried the least populous state, Wyoming, with 68 percent of the vote, while Clinton won the most populous state, California, with 62 percent. But because of the small-state bias, it took just 58,140 Trump voters to secure each of Wyoming’s three electoral votes, while it took 159,160 Clinton voters apiece to win California’s 55 electoral votes. Of the seven small-population states (plus the District of Columbia), Trump won five in 2016, for an advantage of six electoral votes.

That may not sound like much, but remember that in 2000, Bush had a similar small-state cushion of seven electoral votes (after a DC abstention) in a year when his

The man behind the curtain: A person casts a ballot on November 8, 2016.



Electoral College tally was 271 to 266.

And that's not even the worst of it. Because of the winner-take-all system by which most electoral votes are allocated, tens of millions of votes cast for losing candidates are effectively discarded, and the highest level of disenfranchisement occurs in the battleground states where elections are decided. In 2016, Trump took Michigan by 10,704 votes, Wisconsin by 22,748, and Pennsylvania by 44,292, yet he got all of their electoral votes. More than 6.5 million Clinton votes were effectively discarded in those states. At the same time, millions of Trump votes were discarded in solidly Democratic states like Illinois and Massachusetts. "The Electoral College really does fail voters for both parties," says Rob Richie, the president and CEO of the election reform group FairVote.

That's a good argument for getting Republicans—at least in some states—on board for the popular election of the president. But the reality is that, where it matters most, the current system favors the Republican nominee and will continue to do so.

This is why Democrats should make the Electoral College a political issue in 2020—as Warren has done most aggressively, though a few others, such as Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and former South Bend mayor Pete Buttigieg, have also been outspoken. Most voters favor the Electoral College's abolition, and the issue has potential as a tool for mobilizing the party's base: 81 percent of Democrats favor electing presidents with a popular vote, according to a June 2019 NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* survey. But this is about more than merely organizing Democrats for 2020; it's a matter of long-term survival. A 2019 University of Texas study of the "inversions" that occur when the winner of the popular vote loses in the Electoral College determined that "in the modern period...Republicans should be expected to win 65 percent of Presidential contests in which they narrowly lose the popular vote."

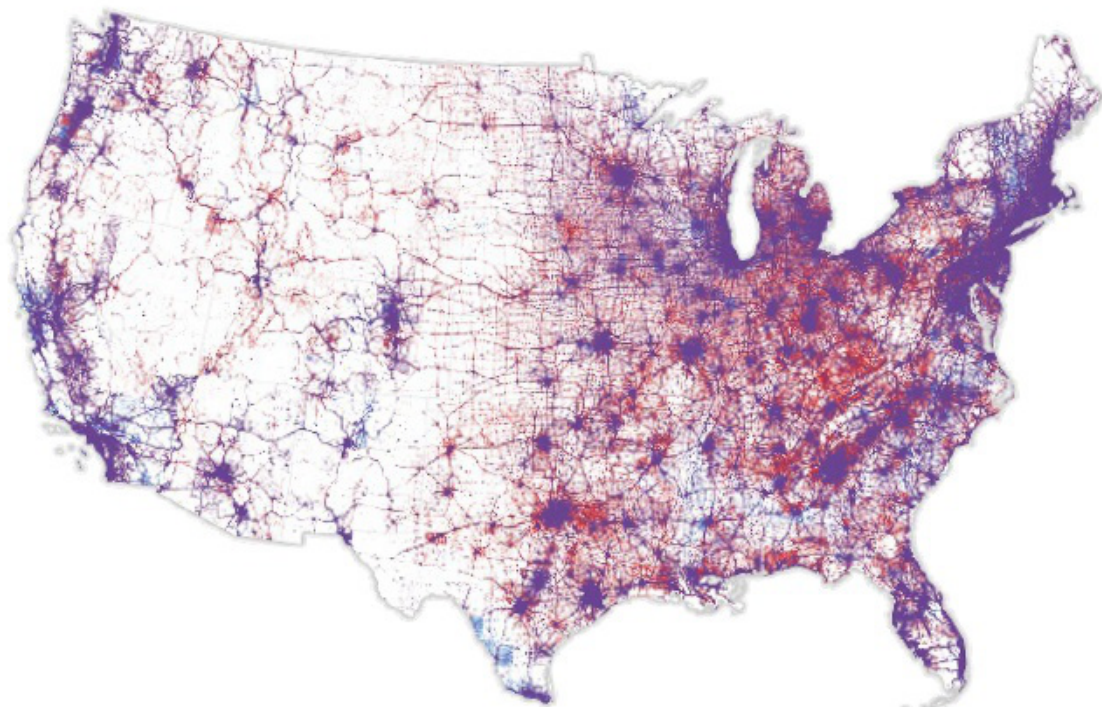
FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR OWN FUTURE, DEMOCRATS must become the party of Electoral College abolitionism. They must make it a part of their platform, their legislative agenda, and their messaging strategies. They must seek to build coalitions that include third-party supporters and honorable Republicans (32 percent of whom supported popular election of the president in the NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* survey).

Skeptics will, of course, rush in with the "news" that it's hard to change a system set forth by the Constitu-

"Of the considerations that factored into the Framers' calculus [for the Constitution], race and slavery were perhaps the foremost."

—Wilfred Codrington III, fellow, Brennan Center for Justice

Red versus blue: The distribution of votes by party in 2016, adjusted for population density.



tion. That's always been true. But it took constitutional amendments to extend the franchise to women, former slaves, and 18-year-olds; to bar poll taxes; to let residents of the District of Columbia vote in presidential elections; and to create a directly elected US Senate. Every one of those crusades required massive organizing, educating, sacrifice, and strategy.

There is a strategic approach for Electoral College abolitionists in the short term: supporting the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, which asks states to bind their electors to the winner of the national popular vote and not to their own results. Fifteen states and DC, with a combined 196 electoral votes, have adopted the compact, which can take effect only when states with a combined total of 270 electoral votes (the minimum needed to secure the presidency) sign on. With endorsements from the League of Women Voters, the NAACP, Common Cause, and other national advocacy groups, this is a serious effort that has made steady progress.

"Every year," says National Popular Vote chair John Koza, "we add a state or two, and that's what we plan to keep doing from now until it becomes law." FairVote's Richie sees the compact as complementing efforts to open congressional debate on abolishing the Electoral College; so too, he says, are the efforts by Harvard Law professor Lawrence Lessig to get the Supreme Court to clarify standards regarding so-called faithless electors, who decide not to support the candidate they are pledged to back.

While these projects are important, the most vital immediate activism could well involve the bully pulpit. Democrats need to get better at preaching the gospel of popular democracy in a way that makes the elimination of the Electoral College part of a vision for addressing money in politics, gerrymandering, and voter suppression. The party cannot drift back toward the unthinking approach that has seen it fail to push for fundamental reform when it had governing majorities.

Democrats should begin by shredding the myths about the Electoral College and recognizing it for the abomination it has been since slaveholding delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 worked overtime to restrict popular democracy. "Of the considerations that factored into the Framers' calculus, race and slavery were perhaps the foremost," Brennan Center for Justice fellow Wilfred Codrington III argues. "More than two centuries after it was designed to empower southern whites, the Electoral College continues to do just that."

But it doesn't stop in the South. In 2016 the Center for Economic and Policy Research noted in a study, "The states that are overrepresented in the Electoral College also happen to be less diverse than the country as a whole. Wyoming is 84 percent white, North Dakota is 86 percent white, and Rhode Island is 74 percent white, while in California only 38 percent of the population is white, in Florida 55 percent, and in Texas 43 percent." As such, the study continued, "the Electoral College not only can produce results that conflict with a majority vote, but it is biased in a way that amplifies the votes of white people and reduces the voice of minorities."

When debates about the Electoral College are placed in such stark terms, they frame the moral case for abo-

lition. But to address the long-term crisis, Democrats must run against the Electoral College while seeking to master it in 2020.

Polling by *The New York Times*' Upshot and Siena College in October 2019 found that Trump remained "highly competitive in the battleground states likeliest to decide his re-election." Those closely divided states are Arizona, Florida, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Democrats should also keep an eye on Minnesota and New Hampshire, where Trump came close to winning in 2016, and, depending on the makeup of the party ticket, perhaps Iowa, Ohio, and Georgia. The party must move sufficient resources to these states, and the eventual nominee must campaign energetically in them—unlike Clinton, who failed to visit Wisconsin once in the fall of 2016.

Democrats must also be realistic enough to recognize that the makeup of the party ticket in 2020 matters. If the nominee is a New Englander like Sanders or Warren, or Joe Biden of Delaware, there's an argument for picking a running mate like Stacey Abrams, who might help turn Georgia and North Carolina, or a Great Lakes senator like Sherrod Brown of Ohio or Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin. Both are progressive populists who in 2018 easily won competitive races in states where Trump prevailed in 2016.

The whole point of any Electoral College strategy for the Democrats has to be exciting the base sufficiently to tip the balance in closely divided states. In his *Democracy*

Democrats won't win these pivotal states and their electoral votes by trying to swing the handful of people who are in the middle.

Now! interview, Moore argued that in light of their advantages among women, people of color, and young voters, Democrats need to "make sure we don't give them another Hillary Clinton to vote for."

Moore speaks with the bluntness of someone who has spent a lot of time thinking about how to win the electoral votes in battleground states. He knows that states like Wisconsin and Michigan are exceptionally polarized, not simply over Trump but also because of state-based fights in the 2010s over everything from labor rights to public education and environmental racism. Democrats won't win these pivotal states and their electoral votes by trying to swing the handful of people who are in the middle. They'll win by mobilizing voters, especially young people and people of color, who may have backed third-party candidates or stayed home in 2016. "Will they come out and vote for a centrist, moderate candidate? I don't think that is going to happen," Moore said. "They're going to come out and vote for the fighter, for the person that shares their values."

This is the bottom line. Democrats are likely to win the national popular vote in 2020 against a president who is disapproved of by most Americans. But to win the Electoral College, they must carry battleground states where Trump remains dangerously competitive. This may not be the game the Democrats would prefer to play. But it's the hand they were dealt by the founders in 1787, and until we finally abolish the Electoral College, it's the hand that must be played for a win. ■



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ORGANIZE AND THEY WILL COME

AFTER THE SHOCK OF 2016, GRASSROOTS ORGANIZERS SET OUT TO MAKE THE IOWA CAUCUSES MORE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CHANGING STATE. SOON WE'LL FIND OUT IF THEY SUCCEEDED.

REBECCA ZWEIG

TWO MONTHS OUT FROM THE 2020 IOWA DEMOCRATIC CAUCUSES, A CROWD OF VOTERS, ACTIVISTS, CAMPAIGN STAFF and volunteers, and press gathered at the Des Moines headquarters of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, a statewide grassroots advocacy group, to participate in a familiar ritual of electoral politics: the candidate endorsement. Leaders from the CCI Action Fund, CCI's political counterpart, and Iowa Student Action (ISA), a group created in 2015, stepped up to the podium to deliver speeches in support of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. His campaign, they said, has championed the key issues they focus on in their community organizing work, including free college, Medicare for All, and moratoriums on factory farms. "We didn't endorse Bernie because we are with *him* on the issues. We are endorsing Bernie because he is with *us* on the issues," proclaimed CCI board president Cherie Mortice, to huge applause. The endorsement was the conclusion of seven months of work by CCI Action's presidential leadership team and ISA, which included candidate questionnaires, issue briefings, a people's forum, to which candidates were invited, and ultimately a vote. (Mortice also mentioned the groups have "common ground" with Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren and former Housing and Urban Development secretary Julián Castro, who subsequently dropped out of the race—a testament to this cycle's competitive field of Democratic contenders.)

But the fanfare ended quickly. After the speeches, roughly 50 attendees, ranging from Iowa State freshmen to retired dirt farmers, piled onto a school bus to take part in a form of politics rarely associated with caucus season: a direct action. A handful of reporters followed.

Less than 20 minutes after the endorsement wrapped up, they packed tightly into the office foyer of the Master Builders of Iowa, a statewide construction industry membership association, and chanted, "Health insurance is a lie. They don't care if people die!" The group was protesting Master Builders' affiliation with the Partnership for America's Health Care Future, an anti-Medicare for All campaign formed by pharmaceutical, insurance, and hospital lobbyists in 2018.

Armed with megaphones, CCI activists took turns reading aloud GoFundMe pages featuring Iowans who couldn't afford their medical expenses and plastering printouts to the office walls with bandages. In a heated exchange, a Master Builders employee yelled at the protesters to get off the property, warning that the police had been called. "So what?" one elderly activist grumbled, even as she showed some "Iowa nice," picking up the bandage wrappers from the office floor.

This confrontation was a far cry from the state fairs and steak fries that are usually featured in coverage of the Iowa caucuses. And that seemed to be the point.

"We're not interested in candidates' stump speeches. We've heard enough of those," Jack Reardon, an organizer with CCI, told me. Those speeches get "a lot of media coverage, but it's not reflective of how a majority of people across this state, across this country, are feeling about politics," they added. "People aren't interested in a particular candidate. They're interested in something that can change their lives."

"People aren't interested in a particular candidate. They're interested in something that can change their lives."

—Jack Reardon,
Iowa Citizens
for Community
Improvement

Rebecca Zweig is a writer and educator living in Mexico City. She taught for several years at the University of Iowa and is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

EVERY FOUR YEARS, IOWA BRIEFLY ASSUMES an outsize level of importance in American politics, then disappears almost entirely from the national discourse. Since 1972, Iowa has held the first presidential contest in the nation—a privileged position that brings a deluge of hopeful candidates, campaign resources, and media attention to the state. (New Hampshire's primary follows a week later; the nation's most populous states, including California and Texas, don't vote until March.) Winning the Iowa caucuses is seen as a significant indicator of a campaign's viability, even though the Iowa electorate, which in 2016 was 91 percent white, is hardly representative of the national electorate. As early as 1984, *The New York Times* reported "growing talk in national committee circles of stripping the state of its first-caucus status in 1988." It never happened. This year, Castro made headlines calling for the Democratic Party to rethink its nominating process, saying that Iowa and New Hampshire aren't "reflective of the diversity of our country or of our party." The 2020 Iowa caucuses will take place February 3, and by then, Democratic presidential candidates are anticipated to have held over 3,000 events in the state since the start of 2019 and have spent an estimated \$11 million on advertising there.

The way Iowans vote has come under fire, too. Iowa's contest is a caucus system, which holds voters captive for hours at their local precincts. Caucusgoers must arrive at a specified time on an early February evening in a state prone to extreme winter weather conditions. To show their support for a particular candidate, voters huddle with others who share their preference. In the Democratic caucuses, if a candidate doesn't reach a 15 percent voter threshold, that preference group

dissolves, and those voters choose another nominee; that's why the process takes hours. Voters who work nights, who cannot find child care, or who are physically unable to access the site because of disability, distance, or lack of transportation are unable to participate.

Both defenders and skeptics of the caucus system point out that those who attend are taking part in the exercise of direct democracy. In order to persuade unattached voters, caucusgoers debate the merits of the candidates; political newcomers can end up in conversation with elected officials. At her first caucus in 2018, Denise Cheeseman, 21, now a full-time organizer with Iowa Student Action, volunteered to be a precinct captain for gubernatorial candidate Cathy Glasson and wound up debating policy with the then-mayor of Iowa City. "It was such a surreal experience.... I was just a kid, and then I'm arguing with the mayor about climate," she said. "Which is the cool thing about the caucus. It's meant to be the most grassroots form of political engagement."

Dave Leshtz and Jeffrey Cox have edited *The Prairie Progressive*, a newsletter about Iowa politics, since the 1980s. Until the early 2000s, state party platform issues were "the real meat" of the caucuses, Leshtz said. "People would stay late because they really want to get a platform through." Leshtz and Cox recounted precinct platforms that demanded repeal of the Second Amendment, called for Irish unity, and endorsed the principles of *The Communist Manifesto*. "They ranged from the ridiculous to the sublime," said Leshtz. "But then they are, at least in theory, put together and studied at county convention by the platform committee. That's how they wind up with the state platform." They agreed that this had changed by the 2004 election. "People got so wrapped up in the glitz of the caucuses, and that's what the game became," said Leshtz. "It used to be we spent more time on gathering sample resolutions. I don't think anybody knows that now."

The Democratic primary process needs an institutional overhaul. But the popular image of the Iowa caucus electorate also needs revision. On the prairie, change is quietly underway. There are indications of a forthcoming resurrection of the forgotten grassroots culture of the caucuses, now for an intersectional age.

A key driver of this shift is that Iowa's demographics are changing rapidly. Since 2000, its Latino population has more than doubled; the median age for Latinos in Iowa is 24. Drawn by employment and refugee resettlement programs, the Asian population has grown by 125 percent during that time. Minorities make up a quarter of the state's student population, compared with 10 percent in 2000. In fact, immigration is the primary factor driving population growth here. If one

excludes Latino immigration to Iowa over the past 30 years, the state's growth would be negligible. Iowa is now 85.3 percent non-Hispanic white, 6.2 percent Latino, 4.0 percent African American, and 2.8 percent Asian or Pacific Islander. Ethnic and racial groups aren't monolithic, of course, but even small blocs can be electorally significant when effectively mobilized.

Meanwhile, pressure from the Democratic National Committee has forced the Iowa Democratic Party (IDP) to implement changes to make the caucuses more accessible to those who have historically been excluded. The most significant change for 2020 is the addition of satellite caucus sites in and outside Iowa, which could substantially broaden participation.

In addition to structural changes to the caucuses, the 2016 election had the result of pushing grassroots organizers to renew their engagement with electoral politics. Activists are using the 2020 caucuses as an opportunity to remake the Democratic electorate through their organizing, with the intent to diversify the caucus base and prompt caucusgoers to think beyond the electoral cycle. Now the question is can the combination of the IDP's reforms and organizers' engagement produce a more diverse and representative turnout for the 2020 caucuses?

Since 2000, Iowa's Latino population has more than doubled; the Asian population has grown by 125 percent.

IN THE RUN-UP TO THE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUSES, VOTER groups typically mobilize alongside the candidates' and party's ground games. In 2020, in addition to groups like the League of Women Voters of Iowa and the Human Rights Campaign, which have long been working on voter turnout in the state, Iowa chapters of groups founded during and after the 2016 election,

including Indivisible, SwingLeft, and NextGen America, will be out in force. Local organizing groups that historically did not focus on electoral politics, like CCI, which was shocked by Trump's election and the effects of Republican trifecta control of Iowa state government, and Indigenous Iowa, which was inspired by the increasingly popular fusion of movement and electoral politics, have also gotten involved. Because of this massive voter mobilization, Democratic officials expect this year to rival 2008's record turnout of nearly 240,000 Democratic caucusgoers.

Just after CCI's Medicare for All action, I met Joe Enriquez Henry, the Iowa political director for the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), a nonpartisan voting and civil rights organization, at Ritual Cafe in downtown Des Moines. The 2020 election cycle will culminate at least a decade of intensive organizing by LULAC to make Iowa's Latino community



On the ground:
Dartanyan Brown is a member of Iowa CCI.

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a strong player in the state's electoral politics. "We're inviting ourselves to the Iowa caucuses this year," he said. "Usually the caucuses are an inside game. They're geared to encouraging the same old white crew, who've been politically connected and who have higher incomes, to go. But they're going to see a lot more brown faces this time around."

Though Latinos currently make up fewer than 7 percent of Iowans, Henry said they could account for 25 percent of the 2020 Democratic caucus electorate. (In 2016, entrance polls indicated Latinos made up only 4 percent of the Iowa Democratic caucus electorate, and some 2008 state entrance polls did not even identify Latino voters; the racial identifiers were "white," "black," and "other.") In 2016, 171,000 Democratic voters showed up to caucuses. LULAC aims to get 10,000 new voters to participate in the 2020 caucuses and registered at least 3,000 by the end of last year. In October 2019, LULAC claimed a victory after challenging a 2017 state voter ID law. While some portions of the law were upheld, the judge struck down its most egregious attempts at voter suppression, including a requirement to show a voter ID number for an absentee ballot.

Henry sees enormous potential in activating young voters in particular. In Iowa, 17-year-olds may caucus if they will be 18 by the time of the general election, so LULAC does voter registration drives in high schools. "There's a lot more young people who are involved because of all the hateful rhetoric from Trump," he said. "We have a lot of young people coming out of mixed status families because our population has grown exponentially in the last 10 to 15 years. The young people in these mixed status families, they get it. And they want to do something about it."

Getting on board: Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement members cheered when the CCI Action Fund announced its endorsement of Senator Bernie Sanders.

"Usually the caucuses are an inside game... geared to encouraging the same old white crew to go. But they're going to see a lot more brown faces this time around."

—Joe Enriquez Henry, League of United Latin American Citizens

IDROVE EAST ON I-80 TO WEST LIBERTY, POPULATION 3,800, to see some of LULAC's organizing efforts in action. In the darkness, I barely registered that I had emerged from the cornfields into a neighborhood—a handful of houses, gas stations, and Mexican groceries that had accrued around the meat-processing plant West Liberty Foods. More than half the town is Latino. Most of the families here emigrated from the same town in Mexico's Durango State, but increasingly there are people from Central America and Puerto Rico coming to look for work. Over the past few decades, this has become the face of rural Iowa; as the demand for labor at meatpacking plants grew, so did the Latino and then Southeast Asian populations.

On a quiet Friday night in early December, the only light emanated from St. Joseph's Parish Center, where LULAC hosted a *lotería*, a traditional Mexican bingo game. As children ran about and the local priest called out selections from the card deck, I talked with Michael Aragon, 20, a LULAC scholarship recipient at the University of Iowa who grew up in West Liberty. He volunteers with various LULAC initiatives, including *loterías* and voter outreach in his hometown. He tutors green card holders for their citizenship exam with the West Liberty Citizenship Education Initiative, which was launched in collaboration with professors at the University of Iowa's College of Education and West Liberty schoolteachers in response to the 2016 election. Tutors prepare candidates for the exam, and LULAC covers half of the nearly \$1,000 exam fee. Right after the naturalization ceremony, LULAC registers the new citizens as voters and begins to educate them on the voting process.

"It activates and expands an electorate that's been overlooked," Aragon said, mentioning there had been an

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deportation in town just a few weeks before. “There’s a lot of fear in the community right now. I think voter education is really necessary.” LULAC uses events like *loterías* to not only register voters but also build civically engaged communities that foster a culture of voting in the growing number of Iowa towns that resemble West Liberty. The *loterías* raise money for scholarship recipients, like Aragon, who then become invested in LULAC’s voter outreach initiatives.

In larger communities like Des Moines, LULAC focuses on reaching potential voters where they are. Nataly Espinoza-Lara, 34, is a LULAC field director based in Des Moines. She came to the US 18 years ago from Mexico and recently became a citizen. Her daughter, America Herrera, 18, is a high school senior and also organizes with LULAC. “I never thought I’d be an activist,” Espinoza-Lara said in a phone interview. In 2009 she was an undocumented single mother working several jobs to stay afloat. At a restaurant where she worked, her employer withheld her wages. She went to Iowa CCI for help. CCI staged a protest of 100 people at the restaurant with signs that read, “Pay your workers” in Spanish and English. Eventually Espinoza-Lara got her wages restored. “They changed my life,” she said. Soon after that, she became active in community organizing.

Espinoza-Lara and Herrera register voters and educate them on the caucus process by setting up information tables in Mexican and Salvadoran restaurants, taking slots on Spanish-language radio stations, and talking with people at food banks. Espinoza-Lara said the Sanders and Castro campaigns have been present in the community but it remains untouched by the majority of presidential campaigns and the IDP. “They don’t reach out to poor people,” she said. “I don’t see [the Biden, Warren, or Buttigieg campaigns] anywhere. Do they only answer wealthy people?”

A major part of Espinoza-Lara’s and Herrera’s work is door knocking in heavily Latino neighborhoods. Espinoza-Lara asks people what they need in order to vote—transportation, more information—and then tries to provide it. “Some people will never open the door now,” she said. “Before 2018, it was different, but ICE is picking up so many people. People are scared, even people who have documents. When someone opens the door, we say to them, ‘Look, we have to change this.’”

Herrera said that the majority of people who refuse to register are probably undocumented. But the organizers always ask if they have family members who could register. “With those family members, they don’t feel powerless because their families can make a difference and speak for them,” she told me. She frames voting as a form of empowerment. “We tell people, ‘This is for you, not for us.’ That’s important. We approach people with a sense of giving them power by voting instead of saying,



Students step up: Sara Castro is an organizer with Iowa Student Action, a group that was founded in 2015 and is pushing for free public college for all.

“We tell people, ‘This is for you, not for us.’ We approach people with a sense of giving them power by voting instead of saying, ‘We need your vote.’”

—America Herrera, LULAC



“We need your vote.”

The LULAC organizers I spoke with emphasized that voter registration is not necessarily synonymous with voter education and access. For many first-time voters to be able and willing to participate, the caucus system necessitates a particular civic education, and some community organizations are focusing on that in 2020. The Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa, an immigrant rights organization that concentrates on wage theft, is involved in caucus organizing for the first time, holding a caucus training session with Arabic

and Spanish interpretation services. But that education is a two-way street. It is also welcoming candidates to hold events in its space in an effort to make the communities that it supports more visible to the campaigns. I spoke with Rafael Morataya, the center’s executive director, after an event with New Jersey Senator Cory Booker. “A lot of candidates say, ‘I didn’t even know there are immigrants in Iowa,’” Morataya said.

That awareness is emerging. “I think engagement is starting to happen,” said Mazahir Salih, a Sudanese American Iowa City councilwoman and cofounder of the center. She said the retail politics aspect of the caucuses—the campaign events and voter education sessions—can be a mobilizing factor for new swaths of the electorate. “It’s exciting to see candidates, especially for low-income people who do not have strong access to the news or the Internet.”

AS GRASSROOTS GROUPS RAMP UP THEIR INVOLVEMENT in voter registration and mobilization, the Democratic establishment is in the process of making the most significant changes to the party’s caucuses in years. After the 2016 election, the DNC enacted reforms to make its presidential primaries more accessible, with a focus on caucus states that had no form of absentee voting. In response, the IDP proposed a virtual caucus system, which the DNC rejected out of cybersecurity concerns. In September the DNC approved the IDP’s plans to significantly expand the number of satellite caucus precincts (in 2016, there were four), which allows voters unable to caucus at their assigned precincts to apply for caucus locations in alternative locations, such as factories, assisted-living homes, LULAC halls, and community centers.

Over 190 applications were made for satellite sites, and the IDP recently announced 99 approved sites. The locations of the sites are not limited to Iowa: There will be satellite sites in Palm Springs, California; at the University of Pennsylvania and the Brooklyn Public Library; and in Glasgow, Paris, and even Tbilisi, Georgia. Only registered Iowa voters will be able to participate. “We’ll be able to bring democracy closer to those who wouldn’t be able to get to their precinct sites,” said Troy Price, the chair of the IDP. “These will be the most accessible, transparent caucuses we’ve ever had. This will increase

participation, and I'm excited about the possibility for the process."

It's a big change, but it may not be enough. While a few unionized shift workers retained a satellite site at their workplace, a Sanders campaign canvasser I met told me that many people declined to commit to caucusing because they can't take time off from work and were concerned about bringing electoral politics into their workplace. Salih suggested that the IDP provide child care to increase participation.

THE OBSTACLES IOWANS FACE WHEN CAUCUSING ARE more extreme versions of problems shared by voters throughout the country. Election Day is still not a national holiday. Many potential voters are isolated from the culture of voting because traditional politics prioritizes "regular" voters, meaning older white voters. According to the Primaries Project at the Brookings Institution, more than half of 2018 Democratic primary voters were white, and nearly 70 percent were age 40 or older. A US Census Bureau study of the American general electorate showed that 73.3 percent of all voters were white in 2016. For most candidates, "their white consultants are saying that they should only be focused on regular voters who happen to be above the age of 50, who are white and have money," said LULAC's Henry. Focusing on those who already vote becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy on who makes up the electorate.

The political world's intense focus on Iowa in the months before the caucuses and its long absence from the state thereafter also demonstrates how our electoral system produces a brief, intense engagement with politics followed by a long period of depletion and exhaustion—rather than a sustained and active relationship with it.

This caucus season in Iowa, local activists are finding that building power requires not only engaging with electoral politics but also developing voters' long-term civic engagement habits. "When we start learning about civics and elections, [it's] like, 'You go vote in November and then vote in the school board, and you did your job,'" said Hugh Espey, the executive director of Iowa CCI. "But the moneyed class, the power elite—that's not how they see it. They see that this is nonstop. They're working at it all the time. We have to work at it all the time and build power, too."

"When I went to my first caucus, the next day I was like, 'Let's go,'" said Iowa Student Action's Cheeseman. "But then everything quiets down for six months after an electoral cycle. We're trying to transition people to the next track and be like, 'Yeah, you want to go?' We have this local campaign, and we're still going."

Steven Meier, 39, is a member of United Auto Workers Local 94 in Dubuque and of the city's Democratic Socialists of America chapter. Despite having lived most of his life in Iowa, he never caucused before 2016 and had rarely voted. Sanders's campaign that year inspired him to see many

of his family's struggles as systemic rather than blame other people for his problems, he said. "I showed up at the caucus and had no idea what to expect, then suddenly I was on the platform committee, then a state delegate. Now if there's a local or state election, I do it all," he told me.

Meier is organizing for the Sanders campaign again this year and doesn't plan to quit once the caucus season is over. "Even if Bernie doesn't win, that's not going to stop us in Iowa. We're building a culture of long-term organizing, but [the caucuses are] a moment to push that organizing, to get people out in the communities."

I talked to Sara Castro, 20, a history major at Grinnell College who also organizes with Iowa Student Action, after the CCI Medicare for All protest. ISA is mobilizing student voters through advocacy for free public college and student debt forgiveness. Though the group began only in the run-up to the 2016 caucuses, it is now active on six campuses across the state, including the University of Iowa and Iowa State. "We're trying to use that conversation [about free college and student debt as caucus issues] to bring in people and keep them engaged," explained Castro. "After all the campaign staff leave in February, no matter who wins, we still want to win our issues."

"After the campaign staff leave in February, no matter who wins, we still want to win our issues."

—Sara Castro,
Iowa Student Action

AN AVERAGE OF THE LATEST IOWA POLLS FROM DECEMBER 7 to January 3 by *RealClearPolitics* has Sanders narrowly leading the field at 22 percent, with former South Bend, Indiana, mayor Pete Buttigieg and former vice president Joe Biden close behind at 21.7 percent and 20.3 percent, respectively. But the polls have been volatile, and many likely caucusgoers remain undecided. And a badly timed snowstorm typical of Iowa winters could change everything.

No matter the outcome, the Iowa caucus electorate is poised to change—and create change itself. "I'm pretty excited about the future," LULAC's Herrera told me. "I know that if we keep doing what we're doing, it'll make a big difference later on."

It's unclear how long Iowa will retain its prized first-in-the-nation status. As of now, there are no concrete moves by the DNC to move the Iowa caucuses later in the primary calendar. But the organizers and activists I talked to will keep pushing Iowans toward a deeper form of political engagement. "We can use [the caucuses] for other things, not just to turn people out to elect a candidate," said Castro. "People are being radicalized by the [electoral] process, and [that] can be invested back into political organizing. We're using the whole momentum of Iowa to move our base and our vision." ■

A new electorate: Iowans demonstrate against ICE deportations and raids. "People are scared.... When someone opens the door, we say to them, 'Look, we have to change this,'" said Nataly Espinoza-Lara, a LULAC field director.



(continued from page 15)

claims are now made defensively is that since 2005, crossing the border outside a designated port of entry has been enforced as a criminal, not a civil, violation. This lands migrants in removal proceedings before they're able to make an affirmative claim at all.

Paired with Trump's newer restrictions narrowing who is eligible for asylum, seeking asylum legally at the southwestern US border has become virtually impossible.

When I tried raising these objections, Phillips interrupted, insisting the difference was still between "a convicted child rapist" and "a politically persecuted individual" who doesn't "want to return to their dictatorship country"—a black and white version of the border crisis you might hear from Trump himself.

THE IDEOLOGY BAKED INTO THE EXPLORERS' CURRICULUM isn't lost on participants. Erick Gomez Lopez, a 22-year-old alum and aspiring border agent from Ajo, went on a trip with his post to a nearby Border Patrol station. A soft-spoken young man, he met me after his custodial work at a local health clinic and rubbed his baseball cap throughout our conversation. "The doors to [their] cells were left open," the detainees were "given snacks," and the people were "not treated like animals," he said, adding that he didn't think they were being treated badly. And yet Lopez seemed uneasy, saying, "They were staring at me."

Later I asked an Ajo Explorer, Ilian Aguilar, what he thought about the migrant deaths around his hometown and the bones and personal belongings regularly found in the surrounding desert.

Aguilar, who's in his late teens, said that the deaths were "a touchy subject" and he "didn't know what to think about them yet." Then the conversation returned to how much the Border Patrol has helped him grow.

Former Explorer Madero said that while he had no problem with others joining the Border Patrol, he didn't pursue a job with it because he didn't think he "could handle or would like work as an agent." But working at the local jail, he has found it hard to avoid those issues entirely. "When Border Patrol arrests immigrant[s], they come to us.... They were probably trying to get away, trying to come here for a better living. But now they are in jail...before they go right back home."

In Ajo's central plaza, the trainee who showed me the video also said he knew that migrants are not criminals and are simply seeking to improve their circumstances. I asked why he continued to participate in the program. "Money," he replied. "Money, money, money."

Ajo's median household income is just over \$33,000, and just under a third of its residents live below the federal poverty line; when the highest-paying jobs in town are in law enforcement, working for Border Patrol makes economic sense.

The moral case for this career path is less clear, and without precise figures from the CBP, it's hard to tell if participation in the Explorers has dropped as public awareness of family separations, assaults and deaths in detention, and other scandals has spread.

In the Maine borderlands, at least, Phillips said, the Explorers program was on hold last year because there weren't enough advisers to run it. The "humanitarian national security crisis at the border" had forced them to deploy down south, he said, but now that apprehensions are down, "we're back at our full contingent of advisers."

They're holding meetings twice a week. ■

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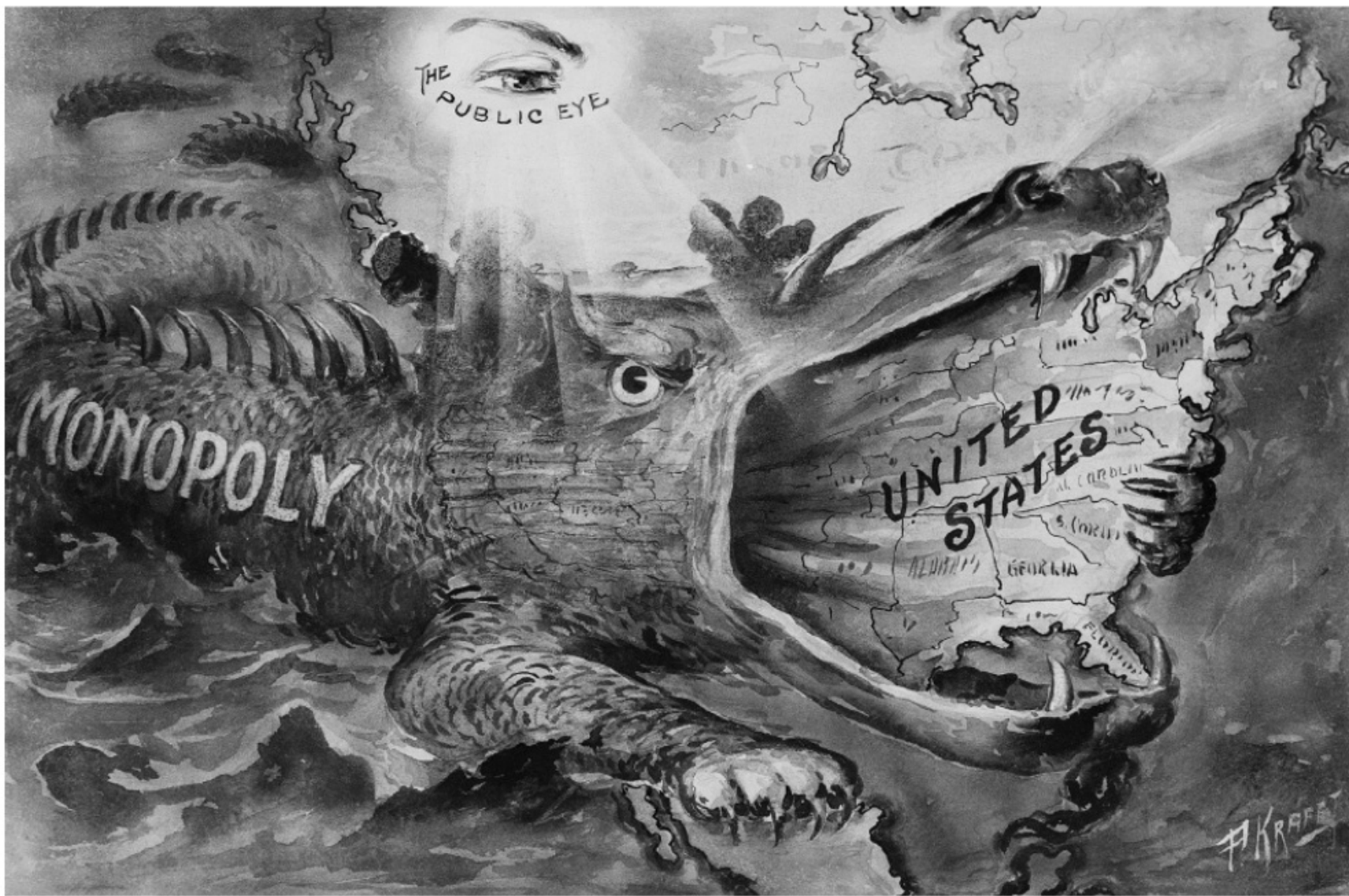
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Books & the Arts



NO GOING BACK

The power and limits of the anti-monopolist tradition

by GABRIEL WINANT

“My father always told me that all businessmen were sons of bitches,” John F. Kennedy once griped, “but I never believed it until now!” The young president recalled this pearl of wisdom in 1962, when the industrial giant US Steel announced its plans to raise prices, despite months of campaigning by the White House against such an increase. Steel was central to the US economy: The new highway system, the vast war machine, the automobiles and the oil pipelines that fed them were all made from it. If steel prices went up, all prices went up, threatening an inflationary spiral. Both Harry Truman

and Dwight Eisenhower had sought to avert this, and Kennedy was no different, making a public show of leaning on US Steel to keep its prices down. But the steel industry was determined to get its way. Under pressure from organized workers demanding higher wages, it felt that it had very little choice.

The 1960s are often remembered as the last decade of the golden age of egalitarian, high-growth capitalism. The New Deal reforms of the 1930s had something to do with this postwar boom, but so did the corporate structure and market position of the giant, vertically integrated industrial corporations like US Steel. In response to organized labor’s challenge, they were able to provide one of the great downward redistributions of income in the history of modern capitalism. These companies could afford to do so, in part,

because they enjoyed limited competition in their coordinated, oligopolistic markets. The US government had dismantled the formal price-control system under pressure from manufacturers in 1946, and so it relied to a large degree on informal mechanisms (so-called jawboning) to hold down prices, often by inserting itself into collective bargaining processes in consolidated markets like steel and autos. Major American steel firms, for example, bargained jointly with the United Steelworkers of America—an affair of such economic significance that it spilled out of the private sector and repeatedly became a public matter. Contract after contract would wind up being settled in the White House. Whoever was president found that he could not afford the havoc of a protracted nationwide steel shutdown and so felt enormous pres-

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sure to deliver a victory to the steelworkers' union. But the White House also could not tolerate increases in the price of steel, which were the employers' device to pay for a union victory. So a tripartite bargain was struck whose purpose (for the government) was to restrain wage and price growth enough to limit inflation, but not so much as to leave workers dissatisfied.

When business, labor, and government come together to determine how much goods would cost and workers would be paid, the result can hardly be described as a market process. The postwar years of the 1950s and '60s were the age of "monopoly capitalism," as the Marxists then called it, or, less polemically, an era of "administered prices." The cartelization of American industry had its negative effects, including the technological stagnation of US manufacturing and the irresistible rise of inflation, culminating in the chaotic 1970s. But in any case, it served many American workers well and, at least for a time, helped produce a more egalitarian country. But when it finally came crashing down, it took working-class incomes with it—a disaster from which we have yet to recover.

In recent years, however, a different account of the origin and nature of economic inequality has become popular in some quarters. Dubbed the new antitrust or new Brandeisianism (after Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, who laid the intellectual foundation for vigorous market reform), this approach offers a distinctive, simple, and insistent diagnosis of economic polarization. Rather than emphasize the punitive turn of social welfare programs, the loss of union density, and the underlying structural pressures on employers to suppress wages, it instead argues that equality was undermined by the renaissance of monopoly power. Monopolies today need not swallow a whole supply chain into a single corporation; instead, they work when a large firm dominates smaller ones, dictating to them without needing to own them. Astride their respective economic sectors, tech companies control our minds, retail giants like Amazon and Walmart enforce terms of production on suppliers and terms of purchase on consumers, and Wall Street firms extract a punishing toll from every movement of money and suck value from the whole economy. Together, they are eroding the integrity of our political and economic systems.

In his new book, *Goliath: The 100-Year War Between Monopoly Power and Democracy*, Matt Stoller, one of the most irrepressible members of this new generation of Brandeisians, elevates this argument to something like

Goliath

The 100-Year War Between Monopoly Power and Democracy

By Matt Stoller

Simon & Schuster. 608 pp. \$29.99

a theory of history. For Stoller, all of American history—and much of world history—has been defined by a struggle between monopoly and democracy. Where property is concentrated, its owners warp the public institutions that exist around them, allowing them to concentrate property still more. At the extreme ends of this quantitative process, the monopolist captures the state itself, with sovereignty a mere trapping of consolidated market power in the hands of a feudal lord or fascist dictator.

Over the history of the United States, Stoller finds the greatest nemesis of such authoritarian pretensions in America's anti-monopoly tradition. For him, anti-monopoly is fundamental to the fabric of American democracy. It began with the American Revolution (which he describes as a revolt against the monopoly privileges of British merchants), gained a mass following with Jefferson, became radicalized with the Populists in the late 19th century, tasted power with the Progressives, and culminated in the New Deal and the mid-20th-century US economy. Minimizing the centrality of corporatist coordination to that era, Stoller insists that the New Deal was fundamentally an antitrust program. Its vigorous regulators broke the power that the robber barons accumulated in the 19th century and drove the moneychangers from the temple of democracy, thereby ushering in a golden age of competition and freedom—until this agenda was undermined by scurrilous and arrogant schemers in both parties, who opened the way for a massive reassertion of corporate power beginning in the 1970s.

What's so telling about this narrative is not only the fact that the golden age of competition that Stoller wishes to restore is the very same period in which great, vertically integrated oligopolies ruled the economy in coordination with one another, labor unions, and the state; it is also that his expansive view of economic power still can't find a place for class conflict—which, although invisible to Stoller, was often the engine of downward redistribution in the midcentury boom. Because he does not grasp how the fundamental antagonism between labor and capital underlies other forms of economic rivalry, Stoller misunderstands the nature of the New Deal and the legacy it leaves us. As a result, his book offers us a useful guide

to some of the ills of concentrated market power today but does not ultimately come to terms with their real origin or present any viable political response.

Stoller initially gained some prominence in the early 2000s as a member of the cohort of progressive political bloggers who found their voice in the early years of the Iraq War. Stoller at first supported the war, but he soon became horrified by how the Democratic establishment rolled over for the agenda of George W. Bush's administration, and he and a set of his peers—writers like Matt Yglesias, Ezra Klein, and Markos Moulitsas—helped mobilize support for progressive reforms and the Democrats who championed them.

Although Stoller continued to see himself as an outsider in the years after Barack Obama's election, he, like the other members of this cohort, joined the intellectual and political ranks of the DC machine and managed to establish their careers before the Great Recession started in 2008. Moulitsas, the founder of the website *Daily Kos*, became an unofficial Democratic Party operative. Klein and Yglesias emerged as celebrated policy journalists, eventually launching the mammoth operation at *Vox*. By the end of the decade, Stoller, for his part, was working as an economic policy staffer in Congress. From this perch, he watched with dismay as the Obama White House did little to break from the prevailing economic consensus. With Clinton administration veterans Larry Summers, Rahm Emanuel, and Timothy Geithner back in power, Obama and his team of economic advisers sided with the lords of finance, directing unimaginable streams of money to shore up Wall Street while letting millions of Americans lose their homes to foreclosure.

This marked a second phase in Stoller's politicization. "It seemed clear to many of us during the bailouts," he notes in *Goliath*, "that the public would turn vehemently against the political establishment for taking their property, their stake in America, and so it has." Stoller left Capitol Hill and fell into the orbit of the anti-monopoly thinkers and activists affiliated with the New America Foundation, particularly journalist Barry Lynn, whose 2009 book *Cornered: The New Monopoly Capitalism and the Economics of Destruction* argued that hidden monopolies have insinuated themselves throughout our economy. For Stoller and this emerging anti-monopoly clique, the betrayal that took place after 2008 had a much longer history. In the 1970s, an affluent faction of Demo-

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crats helped kill the party's "populist soul."

Stoller began to formulate this thesis in historical terms in a widely shared essay that appeared in *The Atlantic* shortly before Trump won the 2016 election. Historians like Judith Stein and Lily Geismer told versions of this story before, arguing that in the 1970s middle-class professionals wrested control of the Democratic Party away from its blue-collar social base and unleashed a set of market-centric reforms and deregulatory schemes. But Stoller offers a somewhat different analysis: The transformation that these middle-class professionals helped to enact tilted the balance of class power, in his view, because it allowed the advance of market concentration. And he tells this story primarily through the perspective of Wright Patman, a Democratic congressman from rural East Texas, a "proud Hillbilly" and dogged foe of market consolidation and financial power. As Stoller announces early in *Goliath*, he sees this history "through [Patman's] eyes." In his telling, Democrats lost their way when the yuppie progressives often called the "Watergate Babies" swept into power in 1974 and ousted Patman from his Banking Committee chairmanship, with grave consequences. "The destruction of the anti-monopoly and anti-bank tradition in the Democratic Party," Stoller writes, "has also cleared the way for the greatest concentration of economic power in a century."

In *Goliath*, he retells the story of Patman and the fall of the New Deal Democratic Party. But Stoller also aspires to something far grander. He insists that almost all of American history can be understood in terms of the struggle between the forces of monopoly on the one hand and democracy on the other, beginning with the feud between the aristocratic Alexander Hamilton and the democratic Thomas Jefferson and extending into the 20th century, with the rise of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt, tribunes of the people in the age of mass democracy. (Glossed over or ignored outright here are the central roles in the Jeffersonian popular tradition of *génocidaire* Andrew Jackson and of pro-slavery politics.) It is, in fact, with Wilson that *Goliath* opens in earnest, with his campaign for the presidency in 1912, when he faced off against Theodore Roosevelt (as well as William Howard Taft and Eugene Debs) over the question of what was to be done about the accumulation of economic power in the hands of the few. Railroad and coal barons mutilated their workers in spectacular workplace horrors, while bankers lorded it over

society like European aristocrats. "We stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord!" Roosevelt declared, and for him, this battle required introducing a corporatist system that regulated but did not break up the new industrial giants. For Wilson, who embraced the ideas of Brandeis, it meant splitting them up—what he called a "New Freedom."

In Stoller's rendering of this story, Wilson attempted to launch something like a New Deal and might have pulled it off if World War I hadn't gotten in the way. But America's entrance into the war in 1917 and the economic chaos and reactionary politics that it unleashed allowed the reassertion of power by the forces of monopoly. "Wilson, so energetic at the beginning of his term," Stoller writes, "could do nothing by the end of his tenure except lie in bed as his administration jailed thousands of innocents, and as the plutocrats swiftly subverted the new order he had imposed just a few years earlier." Apparently, the Wilson administration's reform agenda rested on the vision and energy of but a single figure, and his physical decline brought the New Freedom down with it. The egalitarian ambitions of Wilson and the anti-monopoly tradition would have to be put on hold as Andrew Mellon, the last of the great robber barons, rose to power and, as secretary of the treasury, unleashed the oligarchic forces of the 1920s. Wealth accumulated at the top, while the common people suffered—a regime Stoller calls "Mellonism."

With the Depression, agency in the narrative shifts again, from Mellon and his accomplices to a new generation of anti-monopolists, including many in Franklin Roosevelt's brain trust and, of course, Wright Patman, Stoller's East Texas hero. Patman arrived in Washington in 1929, the year of the crash, and almost immediately set about bird-dogging Mellon. Patman supported the marchers of the Bonus Army, advocated cheap credit for farmers, and wrote with Arkansas Senator Joe Robinson a landmark anti-monopoly bill in 1936 that barred predatory pricing in retail.

A beneficiary of the South's racist one-party system, Patman may have been a champion of economic competition, but he also spent decades in power without much political competition, accruing seniority and rising to the chairmanship of the Banking Committee. (This was the reason he drew the ire of the Watergate Babies in 1975; they wanted to eject the Southerners from their powerful sinecures.) Stoller unconvincingly suggests his great man was only as racist as he was obliged to be politically and was appreci-

ated by his black constituents, even if Patman was, after all, one of only five Texas Democrats in the House to sign the 1956 Southern Manifesto denouncing the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. (Seventeen refused.)

One wishes Stoller had paused to contemplate why anti-monopoly tended to find its most vigorous advocates in white Southerners like Wilson, Robinson, and Patman. He suggests this is merely a coincidence and that there existed no historical relationship between white supremacy and pro-competitive politics. In part, this is because Stoller really is interested only in telling us how the relentlessly populist Patman's advocacy helped shape the New Deal. "Patman brought forward what the farmers of the 1890s demanded of their society, a democracy with an egalitarian system of free enterprise, where small business had the same shot as Andrew Mellon to compete. He stood up to Mellon. He stood for the plain people, and the veterans. And in doing so, he destroyed the legitimacy of the plutocrats that dominated America." Summarizing the emerging egalitarian era, Stoller observes, "Finally, after the second great war of the century, democracy had taken hold in the commercial sphere."

If this doesn't match your idea of the origins of the New Deal era, you're not alone. Wishing anti-monopoly to be a politics for all times and places, Stoller cannot allow it any historical specificity. He does not satisfactorily wrestle with the fact that Patman and his antitrust attorney allies formed only one part of the New Deal coalition. Anti-monopoly was a part of a much larger political spectrum, which also included corporatism of just the kind Stoller abhors. Distinguishing among these elements is possible, and one can argue that one is preferable to the other. But doing so would also require acknowledging the existence and logic of another dimension of the New Deal beyond antitrust and corporatism—and that would mean considering labor and class.

In *Goliath*'s second half, Stoller gives us his story of how the New Deal's anti-monopoly democracy was unmade. Some of the beats are familiar: His narrative dwells on the rise of the Chicago School of economics—what Stoller calls "the new Mellonism"—where American antitrust law was reinvented by characters like law professor Aaron Director, economist George Stigler, and jurist Robert Bork. The result was the law and economics movement, which played an enormous role in changing doctrine in general and elevating the significance of

consumer welfare in particular. These thinkers constructed a consumer welfare standard for antitrust cases that didn't necessarily focus on big or small but rather cheap and thus became the cover under which market power reasserted itself. (Whatever else Amazon is, it is cheap and convenient for the consumer.)

But the Chicago School neoliberals and the politicians and judges they influenced were given valuable cover, Stoller argues, by intellectuals on the left, who saw in large-scale economic concentration the basis of a social order beyond capitalism—and saw in populism only backward-looking reaction. Stoller reserves pages of bizarre vitriol here for sociologist C. Wright Mills, historian Richard Hofstadter, and economist John Kenneth Galbraith, whom he blames for eroding the ideological basis of antitrust in the postwar years. “Hofstadter and Galbraith together,” he tells us in a puzzling passage, “created a new language and new frame of analysis designed to eliminate the antimonopoly tradition in American politics. A new villain, the grubby racist small businessman, had replaced the money trust.” As Stoller concludes later on, “‘Beautiful smugness’ is how John Kenneth Galbraith and Richard Hofstadter persuaded a generation to give up their liberties.” Even if Stoller's readings of these thinkers represented them accurately, this would seem an awfully large role to assign to a sociologist, a historian, and an economist—even unusually prominent ones.

While neoliberalism germinated in Chicago and smug intellectuals fulminated in New York, finance regrouped. “Set free from their wartime constraints, and then from the constraints imposed by White House control over the Fed, bankers tried to seize more power,” Stoller writes, and financiers like Citibank chief Walter Wriston and conglomerate mogul Saul Steinberg invented financial tools to manipulate the market—including the certificate of deposit, a bond-like instrument that allowed Citibank to evade regulations meant to limit bank size. When Patman came after these bankers, his success was mixed; they had learned from the experience of the 1930s. Stoller writes:

Wriston didn't appear as a robber baron, but a cosmopolitan executive who believed in racial tolerance, liked rock 'n' roll, and wanted to be a responsible business leader in a technologically advanced society. Citibank, as he told governors and local politicians, didn't pollute, and it went without mention that the bank didn't send soldiers to Vietnam.

Perceiving an intersection between a fashionable cultural progressivism born out of the 1960s and a renascent economic oligarchy, Stoller continues, affluent, snobby liberals teamed up with bankers against the American people. By the early 1970s, everyone from Ralph Nader and the Watergate Babies to enlightened bankers and Chicago School economists were working together to bring the curtain down on economic democracy. With Patman ousted in 1975, Jimmy Carter deregulating key markets shortly thereafter, and Democrats taking up the Chicago School's ideas, corporate power took off. Unshackled from regulatory constraints, big-box retail spread across small-town America, while banks and more exotic financial firms began to reassert themselves, growing in size and power. From there, Stoller offers us a straight line to the election of Trump, who fed on the democratic decay that set in once the regulatory state had been dismantled. As Stoller puts it in his *Atlantic* essay, “The story of Patman's ousting is part of the larger story of how the Democratic Party helped to create today's shockingly disillusioned and sullen public, a large chunk of whom is now marching for Donald Trump.”

In this respect, *Goliath* is an ambitious and risky undertaking that proffers a century-long narrative encompassing virtually every aspect of American political and economic life. But Stoller tends to tell his story from the perspective of individual politicians, intellectuals, and millionaires—Patman, Wilson, Brandeis, Mellon, and the like. Structural forces recede, personalities grow in importance, and it becomes difficult to tell why anything is happening.

For this reason, great changes that Stoller would like to trace tend to go unexplained except in terms of the greed and corruption, or farsightedness and altruism, of particular individuals. Wilson's Federal Reserve, for example, was a good idea—“designed to move power over the economy from Wall Street to the people”—until it fell into the hands of “shortsighted private bankers who could not or would not stop speculative bubbles.” (Why? How?) The defeat of Wilson's ostensibly benevolent peace plan is also attributed to the machinations of robber barons. “[Henry Clay] Frick and Mellon believed that America should use its power solely to enhance American financial interests, not to engage in some scheme for world peace. The two men

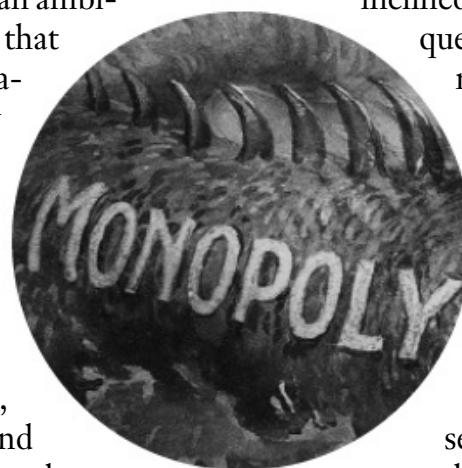
saw opposition to the [Treaty of Versailles] as a way to discredit the Democrats and drive them from power.” Mellon then became the most powerful man in the country—“King Andrew”—setting the stage in turn for the stock market crash of 1929. Everything in this narrative is about market power, and market power is about greed and opportunity.

Yet when one attempts to peer beneath this layer of individual action, avaricious or heroic, Stoller's narrative begins to unravel. In order to conjure up a united front of the common people against corporate power, he repeatedly collapses the distinction between the problem of monopoly and the problem of class. Again and again, he cites capital's offenses against labor as evidence of the need for anti-monopoly measures, writing phrases like “small businessman and blue-collar worker” as if the reader will not notice he has named two separate things.

Stoller isn't wrong in asserting that there were many working-class people invested in breaking the power of the robber barons, but anti-monopoly as it emerged as a mass movement in the late 19th century was only one component of what was often called “the social question,” or if you were less inclined to euphemism, “the labor question.” To be sure, agrarian rebels demanded the death of the money power, while huge strike waves shook the country in 1877 and again in 1886, developing into general strikes in multiple cities. The United States saw repeated instances of workers shutting down large sections of the nation's rail network in wild, out-of-control confrontations.

Gun battles between unions and company thugs became more and more common, as in Homestead, Pennsylvania, in 1892 and Cripple Creek, Colorado, in 1894. But at issue in these labor conflicts was not just the cartelization of the economy but the whole system of relationships that made up America's social order, in particular the “wages system”—that is, capitalist labor markets—and its bouts of wage cuts and unemployment. When workers in these struggles denounced monopolies, they often did so because they viewed concentrated capital as part of a deeper problem: capitalism itself. They struck because industrial wage labor was a new form of domination, and they wished to diminish and eventually end it.

For Stoller, however, inequality and the class tensions it unleashed are made not inside the process of production but in the



“commercial sphere.” Industry and commerce, however, are obviously not the same thing, and this conflation leads him to serious conceptual problems. The political issues that arise from production occur between labor and capital—over wages, hours, safety, unionization, workers’ control, and so on—and are quite distinct from conflicts over market power, which occur between capital and capital and, as the legal scholar Lina Khan put it, concern “product quality, variety and innovation” as well as prices. The two are related to each other, as when labor markets take on monopsonistic characteristics, but they remain distinct. Yet wherever he looks, Stoller sees the two spheres as one and accordingly vexed by the same question: what to do about the robber barons—which is to say, the issue of concentration at the top.

Social inequality, the relationship between the classes, and the maldistribution of economic and political power are all collapsed into a question of the bigness and badness of the biggest, baddest members of the elite.

He is also correct in asserting that anti-monopoly sentiment has enjoyed a large social base in American history, but it was not among “the people” in general and certainly not the working class in particular. Rather, it was a politics that arose among several distinct social and economic groups as they came under increasing economic pressure around the turn of the 20th century and settled on trust-busting as the instrument of their relief. They were not all of one kind. There were farmers and craftsmen, shopkeepers and small businessmen, spread out across small towns and the countryside. These groups linked up

with Progressive lawyers and professionals in the first third of the 20th century—especially those influenced by Brandeis—who believed that market regulation could limit the power of corporations in order to produce a stable, harmonious social order.

Yet since Stoller takes as a given that anti-monopoly populists speak on behalf of the people as an organic whole, he presents Patman and the antitrust activists in the New Deal as the entirety of that project’s egalitarian thrust. Invisible in his account is the Northern social democratic politics of millions of working-class Americans that—I think I’m on safe ground here—was also quite influential in shaping that era’s policies. Whether or not you rate antitrust as important, it still beggars belief to see it as a more significant force in the remaking of American society in the 1930s than the insurgency of millions of industrial workers and the wave of reforms they won: the National Labor Relations Act, which established union rights; the Social Security Act, which created the eponymous program as well as family assistance and unemployment insurance; the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established the 40-hour workweek and the minimum wage and banned child labor; and, indirectly, legislation touching on housing and urban development, veterans’ policy, and more.

A telling example of Stoller’s oversight in this regard comes in his narrative of the Southern crusade of small businesses and farmers against the predations of the A&P market chain. While relating this story, Stoller mentions as an aside that the giant chain struck an alliance with the American Federation of Labor and various progressive consumer and cooperative groups to strengthen its hand against the antitrusters. This anti-anti-monopoly alliance, which wedded the interests of labor to those of a large corporation, represents the spirit and logic of the New Deal at least as well as Patman does. Stoller, however, cannot see it as anything but opportunism. The fact that Patman supported the Taft-Hartley Act, establishing right-to-work laws and hobbling the labor movement, also goes unexplored.

To be fair, part of the problem here is that the New Deal was itself a fundamentally equivocal and contradictory regime. It attempted to marry market regulation and antitrust with an implicit corporatism. While breaking up and regulating some markets, liberal policy-makers continued to pursue high-level social bargains among capital, labor, and consumers, explicitly until 1935 and tacitly and indirectly for decades thereafter. Stoller hyperbolically draws parallels



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between the former efforts—those that accepted or even encouraged corporatist social compromises—with fascism and then proceeds to ignore them as a key component of Democratic rule from the New Deal to the Great Society. But his elision of the centrality of labor-management conflict and compromise also leads him to elevate antitrust from a component of liberal policy to a synonym for democracy and freedom.

Goliath finds a key case study, for example, in the way the federal government set up competitors to Alcoa's aluminum monopoly in the 1940s. This move, meant to keep the supply of aluminum flowing for the war machine, is presented as substantiation of Stoller's reimagined version of World War II as a global struggle between monopoly and free competition. (One wonders where the Soviet Union is in this account.) But as historian Jonathan Bean observes, two-thirds of major war production contracts went to the largest 100 corporations, and two-thirds of research and development money went to 68 firms. Small manufacturers shrank dramatically over the war years in terms of relative employment while large ones grew. After the war, when it came time to reconvert the \$17 billion of publicly owned defense industries to privatized civilian production, two-thirds of their economic value went to 87 firms. Bean writes, "The federal government sold all of its synthetic rubber facilities to the Big Four rubber companies and allowed U.S. Steel to purchase 71 percent of all the publicly built steel plants." The steel monopoly, as we already noted, became a key mechanism in the balance between capital and labor struck by New Deal liberals, allowing for wage increases for the organized workers who formed the base of the Democratic Party. Yet you simply will not encounter in *Goliath* the overwhelming counterevidence that suggests the New Deal was marked by such social democratic features balanced on oligopolistic markets.

All of this is to not discount the fact that the New Deal experimented in antitrust efforts more actively than what came before it or after it, but it did so while helping to bolster a monopolistic and quasi-corporatist economic system. The New Deal and its heirs, in other words, rested on multiple pillars. White Southern Democrats wanted cheap manufactured goods, competitive markets, and decentralized power that protected their racial order in the South; the multiethnic, multiracial, and working-class coalition of Northern Democrats wanted high wages and stable employment in industry. The tension between these two, structur-

al as well as ideological in nature, eventually consumed the party in the 1970s in the economic chaos called "stagflation."

For someone making a political argument by way of history, Stoller can view monopoly quite ahistorically. For many, monopoly is a more or less inevitable result of capitalist development. Marxists have argued that market consolidation is a mechanism by which capitalism has managed its periodic crises. By "socializing" production, or summoning together the once dispersed productive powers of society into a collective force, monopoly at once advanced capitalism's development and produced a kind of socialism in embryo trapped by its private ownership structure. For capitalists, this was true too. J.P. Morgan saw the rise of monopoly as an irresistible element of capitalism. Breaking up the trusts was as impossible, he said, as unscrambling an omelet. As a historical phenomenon—that is, developing over time in relation to particular contexts of events—monopoly has qualities that make it difficult to reverse. On this view, anti-monopoly is useful only within a larger account of the development and trajectory of capitalism itself, of which monopoly is just a symptom.

But for Stoller, monopoly is something that exists mostly outside time and the particularities of political economy. The essence of monopolization can be found in both medieval feudalism and 20th-century fascism. China, too, Stoller tells us, is just one giant monopoly. The phenomenon has no distinct

The Nightmare Touched Its Forehead to My Lips

For the living, water. And now,
you're all the wells mined for their depth.
All of the silence
& all of the *alls* I can conjure.
You are not in the living room.
You are not in your chair.
I drove to the end of the world today.
Snow in the forecast,
so I left my bicycle
& the other half of your ashes at home.

ANDRES CERPA

cause other than the greed of the powerful and the power of the greedy; it is merely the name for what happens when greed and power meet. It has, in this sense, no history that can be related except through the machinations of individuals, nefarious or heroic.

Operating with an anti-monopoly analysis but not a historical one, Stoller as a result constantly gets things only half right. "What of the party of the people, the Democrats?" he asks as he moves into the 1980s and '90s. "Throughout American history, the triumph of plutocrats in a decade provoked a backlash, and the opposing party would win a series of elections and reorient political economy. But the Chicago School has dismantled this fail-safe." Stoller is of course correct that the Democrats failed utterly to channel the miseries of neoliberalism into a political challenge and instead have served as handmaidens to worsening inequality. But the idea that this collaboration is due to the influence of the Chicago School in particular—as opposed to much larger structural forces that have prevailed around the world—is not an analysis; it's a conspiracy theory. It also excludes almost all of the important reasons Democrats turned rightward and implies no theory of what might be done to counteract this. No vision of politics follows from the insight that elites sometimes scheme and accrue influence. This becomes a genuinely political idea only when it can be used to develop a specific vision of conflicting interests, friends who might be organized and enemies who must be divided and overcome. "They're for the powerful, we're for the people" is something

Al Gore said in his acceptance speech for the Democrats' 2000 presidential nomination; one hopes for something a bit more precise in a 600-page book.

The ahistorical and thus apolitical quality of Stoller's book becomes even more apparent when he attempts to generalize the perfectly sound idea of breaking up some monopolies into a transcendent principle of democratic life: that the basis for all forms of freedom—social, economic, political—lies in open access to commerce. "Each of us," he rhapsodizes in his conclusion, "is a worker, a businessperson, a consumer, and a citizen." I am not a businessperson, and I suspect this may be true for many of my readers too. As far as I can tell, even Stoller is not a businessperson. Many in this country are, of course, also not citizens, as we are grimly reminded every day. Even in the working class, millions are not workers in the strictest sense. Many students, incarcerated people, disabled people, retirees, and the unemployed do not perform wage work.

Yet Stoller's eye can track only the disposal of property, and in it he finds liberty itself. Capital encounters merely other capital, big or small. The vast majority of us who lack property that we can live off and thus must sell our labor power to survive are visible, in this analysis, only if we're conceived of as tiny capitalists. Stoller's history, as a result, is blind to the structural coercion of workers that brings them into their encounter with capital and gives capitalism its fundamental character. For those of us who cannot live off our property, the economy is not where we become free through trade; it is where we become unfree through work or the lack of it. Property is a relationship, not an object. The liberty it grants some is always domination for others. The Jeffersonian smallholder class, for example, was built on the backs (or the land) of women, children, slaves, low-wage and migrant workers, and indigenous people. A focus solely on market relations loses sight of this political and economic domination.

Stoller's framework also causes him to present anti-monopoly as a principle transcending differences between the right and the left—an approach that gives space to a nationalist vision of the people as an integral whole and who are beset by insidious outsiders. On the hunt for anti-monopolists of all shapes and sizes, he finds an ally in Senator Josh Hawley, a "national conservative" who delivered a thinly veiled anti-Semitic speech about the "cosmopolitan" attack on America's "common culture," because of Hawley's criticism of Big Tech. (It seems likely that Stoller is naive here rather than cynical, but

it can be only one of the two.) In the same vein, he has become an advocate of confrontation with China, writing in *Foreign Policy*, "The era of strong private corporate power is over. Public power is being reasserted over U.S. corporations. The only question is whether the public power that assumes control of Western corporations, and thus Western society, is American or Chinese."

One need not applaud the regime in Beijing to dread where this goes. And Stoller also regularly bemoans the effects of monopoly on America's weapons-making capacity and recently criticized tech workers for protesting their employers' work with the Pentagon. "Warfare tech and AI isn't necessarily about killing," he explained on Twitter, "and weakening the military institutions isn't the right way to change *war policy.*"

Throughout the book, Stoller distinguishes his anti-monopoly politics from the socialist and social democratic traditions of the left. Since he sees the tradition stretching from Jefferson to Patman as the core of democratic politics in America, anything that falls outside the spectrum between Hamilton and Jefferson is invisible, an illegitimate infiltrator, or an especially curious specimen of Hamiltonism or Jeffersonism. If you follow his commentary, you'll know, for example, that he's convinced that W.E.B. Du Bois's classic *Black Reconstruction*—a book that speaks approvingly of Reconstruction as a "dictatorship of the proletariat"—is merely an entry in the Jeffersonian tradition, contrary to Du Bois's Marxist intentions. This reading rests precisely on a misunderstanding of the desire of freed slaves to own land as an impulse toward small business rather than the wish to be free of the supervisor's lash.

It is clear from the outset of *Goliath* that Stoller very evidently wishes for a more just and equal world, and many of his solutions—breaking up and regulating the big banks and tech companies, for example—would be far preferable to the status quo. But he does not explain any of the reasons an anti-monopoly politics might win or achieve any staying power. If all of American history is defined by the struggle between the great heroes of anti-monopoly democracy and the avarice of Mellonism, then why would powerful and greedy men not machinate once more against antitrust laws? Why wouldn't disdainful intellectuals conspire against the people's cause yet again? If the prevalence of monopoly, as Stoller insists, bears no relation to the larger social and economic environment and is purely a voluntary choice, then there's no reason

to believe that anti-monopoly can produce a stable resolution to the problem of corporate power. From where might antitrust politics draw social and political power with a mass base of farmers, craftsmen, and small businessmen long gone? What might bind the people as a whole together to confront their overlords? By way of employment in some cases, low prices or convenience in others, the monopolies that he detests have sunk their roots into large sections of society. Come after Amazon, and you come after its tens of millions of users too.

The socialism that Stoller dismisses emerged precisely in answer to these problems. It contends that capitalism gives rise—not once but repeatedly—to a potentially coherent and antagonistic social force capable of collective action. This is the working class. Because capitalism produces a larger population over time that cannot survive from its own property and therefore joins many of these people at sites of collective labor, it makes it possible for them to organize and then to exercise leverage and political leadership over other sectors of society. (This is the reason that the most exciting intellectual work in antitrust is being done by scholars who work on market power specifically in employment, such as Sanjukta Paul, Suresh Naidu, and Marshall Steinbaum.) One may criticize the socialist's faith in the working class as politically naive or empirically inaccurate. But in any case, socialism (and beneath it Marxism as well) contains a theory of politics—a definite account of friends and enemies and why each is what it is—whereas Stoller's populism does not. This is why socialists have proved to be so much less prone to deviations into jingoism and conspiracy theory than their populist peers.

One might also add that socialism and anti-monopoly are not necessarily opposed; In recent history, as well in the New Deal era, the two have blended in a combined opposition to the current economic and political order. For both sides, this blending together has been both opportunistic and fruitful. The presence in the presidential race of candidates who approximately represent each ideology illustrates the dynamic of this marriage of convenience. The socialist who speaks of class war allows the anti-monopolist to leverage her plans for fixing it into popularity; in turn, the plan maker must mimic the socialist's positions in order for her gambit to succeed, thus validating his ideas. Each gets to obfuscate usefully through the presence of the other and because they share enemies: Wall Street and its political representatives.

But Stoller's book also demonstrates

some of the underlying differences. Anti-monopolists oppose the economic elite but not the social system that gave rise to it. Likewise, between socialism and anti-monopoly lies a vast difference in analysis about the nature of the state and, indeed, power itself. For the anti-monopolist, the state is a shield for the people against their plutocratic enemies; power inheres in the state, and it is only a question of whether the people capture it through elections. The anti-monopolist agenda is therefore to put the good expert into office, where she may wield the regulatory power of the state for the common good. For the socialist, on the other hand, the state is not neutral. Its purpose and nature are to serve the interests of the ruling class. If it can be remade to serve the working class, this project cannot be achieved without enormous social conflict, and this change can come only from below, not just through elections but through sustained attacks on authority at every level: in workplaces, schools, families, neighborhoods, and beyond. Friendly elements within the state may lend important support to such struggles, and this is one of the reasons socialists seek state power. But socialism cannot be achieved solely by means of such power.

Which of these analyses you believe (and which diagnosis you accept) is, in part, the result of the different historical narratives that we tell. If you think the problem we face is something like “crony capitalism” or “money in politics,” then there is one weird trick that will fix it: reining in the too-powerful corporations—often by using laws already on the books—in order to get back to the people’s business. This program, often presented as structural change, nonetheless represents an explicitly superficial approach: the idea that our economy has acquired a predatory, parasitic stratum at its top that needs to be stripped off, allowing the underlying system to work as intended. Explicitly or not, it’s the promise of a return to a lost utopia of markets, a society without fundamental antagonisms. If, on the other hand, you think our problems are deeper, woven more fundamentally into the structure of how we live together—which things and people we value and which we discard, who must wear the saddle and who gets to ride—then there’s no going back. If the problem lies with capitalism as a system and not specific malicious capitalists, then we’ve got to embark on an adventure of a different kind, one that leads us not back to the comforts of midcentury America but somewhere wild and new. *Goliath* will not help us find the way. ■



UNDERCOVER

Lauren Wilkinson’s novel of espionage, race, and empire

by JENNIFER WILSON

Five years ago, I was in my living room in New Jersey, finishing up a dissertation on chastity in 19th century Russian literature when I got a call from the CIA. As the recruiter went through the details about why he wanted me to work in clandestine affairs, I found myself impressed by his timing. He had known precisely when to call; at any other time in my life, nothing about this offer would have been attractive. I grew up being told the CIA was why we couldn’t have nice things (like democratically elected leaders in South America). But I was at a low point. I had no job prospects, was about to lose my health insurance once I finished my PhD, and was planning to move back in with my parents at the age of 28. I had become depressed and was behaving extremely out of character—I stole someone’s sushi from my university department’s refrigerator,

attended an on-campus self-actualization workshop where an ex-McKinsey consultant asked us to meditate in a circle, and applied for a job working on a salmon fishing boat in Kamchatka. I felt lost and unwanted, and here was someone telling me that I could be James Bond.

A few weeks later, I divested myself of whatever fantasies I had about the CIA and the fast cars I might drive and multiple passports I might carry and told the recruiter that I couldn’t go through with it. “Good luck with your dissertation,” he said in response, which I tried not to read as a threat. I noticed soon after that when I told some of my colleagues the story, they seemed incredulous, even though we all knew other Russian literature PhDs who had been approached by “the agency.” The idea of a black woman working as a spy was bewildering to them. Spies are supposed to blend in, and whiteness—the racial default in the United States, at least—is presumed to carry with it a kind of invisibility. I

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also asked myself how I could work for the CIA, but for radically different reasons. For as long as it operated, the CIA made itself abundantly clear where it stood on questions of racial equality and black self-determination, trying to undermine the Black Panther Party and Martin Luther King's Poor People's Campaign and having a hand in Nelson Mandela's arrest. How could someone black participate in that history, particularly on behalf of a government that treated us like second-class citizens?

These ideas all came back to me as I was reading *American Spy*, the debut novel by Lauren Wilkinson. *American Spy* follows Marie Mitchell, an African American woman who works for the FBI before being contracted by the CIA to help sabotage a socialist government in Burkina Faso in the 1980s. In a sweeping and action-packed story that stretches from Harlem to Martinique and Ouagadougou, the novel never strays too far from the two opposing forces in Marie's life: her identity as a black American and her consequently vexed relationship with the history of the institutions she serves. The novel often flashes back to her childhood and teenage years, when Marie's affections are similarly divided. Her father works as a New York City police officer, and her sister enlists in the military in the midst of the Vietnam War. Yet her mother, who hails from Martinique, reads Frantz Fanon and considers her husband and his FBI friends "snitches," while Marie's boyfriend, Robbie, is a Black Panther sympathizer who calls her sister a "sellout" (a word that will haunt Marie into adulthood). Later, her colleagues at the FBI question why she joined the bureau, suspicious of her true loyalties.

In this way, *American Spy* is unlike traditional spy fictions, which tend to center on heterosexual white men whose patriotism, both in life and on the page, is never questioned. As Marie goes back and forth between identities and affiliations—an American agent in Burkina Faso, a black woman in the United States—*American Spy* suggests that by virtue of who she is, Marie is already skilled in what it means to be a double agent. There are shadows of W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness throughout the novel that suggest provocative parallels between spycraft and black life in America. As such, Wilkinson does not graft the matter of race onto the spy novel but rather asks us to think about how being a minority is, in a sense, an act of espionage, a precarious state marked by shifting identities, competing loyalties, and a constant threat of violence.

American Spy

A Novel

By Lauren Wilkinson

Random House. 304 pp. \$27

Marie joins the FBI's New York City field office in 1985, the famous "Year of the Spy," when a string of high-profile espionage rings was uncovered in the United States. She becomes especially intrigued by the story of Sharon Scranage, an African American stenographer for the CIA who was stationed in Ghana and coaxed into giving up state secrets to her boyfriend, a Ghanaian intelligence officer. Scranage's case foreshadows the complex set of feelings that will come over Marie when she finds herself attracted to her eventual target, Thomas Sankara, a real-life Marxist revolutionary who became president of Burkina Faso and is known, even today, as "the Che Guevara of Africa."

When we first see Marie on the job, she is meeting with one of her informants, a young mother named Aisha—"my favorite snitch," as she calls her. Aisha's uncle leads the Patrice Lumumba Coalition, an actual organization that was founded in New York City in the 1970s to support African liberation movements and to protest apartheid. The organization is under FBI surveillance, Marie explains, because of its ties to the Communist Party USA and because some of its members are former Black Panthers. The legacy of COINTELPRO, the FBI's wide-ranging effort to subvert the activities of socialist, black nationalist, and civil rights organizations in the 1960s, is always in the background of *American Spy*. Marie recalls seeing her father's friend, an FBI agent she refers to as "Mr. Ali," on TV at Malcolm X's funeral, speaking as the secretary for the Nation of Islam under an assumed name. "Mr. Ali," Marie explains, had "been one of a small handful of black special agents hired during J. Edgar Hoover's tenure at the bureau. They were brought on to participate in the Counterintelligence Program—COINTELPRO—and used almost exclusively to undermine civil rights activists." Marie worries that by developing Aisha as an informer, she, too, is becoming part of that legacy. So she forges her boss's signature to terminate Aisha's contract—the first of many acts of insubordination Marie will commit as she begins to question her role and place in history.

Marie is underutilized at the FBI. She feels there is a glass ceiling for her as a black woman and wants a higher-profile assignment, a chance to distinguish herself. The

opportunity finally comes when Sankara, as Burkina Faso's new president, comes to New York to give a speech at the United Nations. He is invited by the Patrice Lumumba Coalition to address a crowd in Harlem as well, and Sankara's ties to the PLC give her an in. The CIA, which has installed an opposition party in Burkina Faso, wants Marie to pose as a UN aide and get close to Sankara to find out how much he knows about the agency's involvement with the party. Eventually, the CIA sends her to Burkina Faso to work at an American NGO (one that gives refuge to women who have been accused of witchcraft). Her assignment is ostensibly to get even closer to Sankara and find out how much he knows about the US presence in the country, but Marie suspects a more nefarious plot is afoot.

A*merican Spy* is written in the form of letters from Marie to her two young sons. Years after the events in Burkina Faso, the three of them survive a home invasion and attempt on her life that leaves Marie's would-be assassin dead. Fearing she might not have long to live, she writes the story of her life for her sons, trying to explain why someone would be after her and, perhaps even more important, to justify the choices she has made over her lifetime.

Wilkinson's choice to frame the novel as a letter to two young black boys brings it into conversation with several other works that similarly confront issues of black life in the United States in epistolary form: Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*, James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, and Imani Perry's *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons*.

The literary references throughout the novel are in many ways reflective of one of Wilkinson's larger ambitions in *American Spy*: to redefine the spy fiction canon by thinking more expansively about what counts as an espionage novel. Though the novels of Ian Fleming and John le Carré certainly make their appearance, Wilkinson is writing as much in the tradition of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Nella Larsen's *Passing*. Both novels explore the complexities of racial subjectivity in America by centering the question of what it means to carry multiple identities, to be at once black and American, an insider in one community and an outsider in another. For Marie, *Passing* is an important book: Her mother, Agathe, is light-skinned and was forced to pass for white by her aunt. Writing about Agathe to her sons, Marie observes, "She moved in and out of New York places where Negroes

were interdits [forbidden], gathering her intelligence on the world that white people inhabited, always feeling she was about to be made."

Marie often speculates as to whether navigating the racial divides of American society is what makes her such a good spy; when she takes on the assignment to infiltrate Sankara's inner circle, she reflects, "It was my first undercover assignment, but I felt strangely confident; slipping into a false identity had proven to be easy for me. I'd had a lot of informal practice with performing different versions of myself to please other people."

Performing different versions of herself is a skill we see Marie use over and over again in the novel, as she tries, as both a black American and a woman, to rise through the predominantly white and male ranks of the FBI—a feat that requires not so much code-switching as self-effacement. Inscrutability is Marie's chosen defense mechanism against racism and sexism. Paradoxically, it has the effect of making her character seem at once underdeveloped and believable. She is impenetrable because she has to be. Like so many black women in white spaces, she finds herself forced to become skilled at making others feel at ease around her. "Spies have to be able to get close to people," her sister tells her.

At the same time, Wilkinson's story is also about the way that family can complicate identity and thus allegiance. We are accustomed to seeing our fictional spies quickly divested of family (e.g., the orphaned James Bond and Jason Bourne) and perhaps defined by that absence. However, Marie is defined by the overwhelming presence of one family member in particular: her father, the retired police officer. When Sankara and Marie walk around Harlem, he criticizes her father's decision to become a cop (a fact that Marie doesn't hide while undercover). "I think if you asked him he'd tell you he tried to do right by us while working within the system," she explains. Sankara then tells her about his father, who served as a gendarme for the colonial government. When he wonders how black men could agree to enforce racist and unjust laws, Marie replies, "He was like my father: He wanted to ensure a better future for his children. That makes sense to me." Marie's pragmatism and her belief in the possibility of working within the system are what her relationship with Sankara will eventually test—ultimately leading to a dramatic twist in Burkina Faso, where Marie's loyalties are complicated still further by desire.

Debates like the one Marie and Sankara have about the feasibility of working within a corrupt system to advance equality, particularly while black, are not new in African American letters. But they have gained a new currency in our culture in the wake of the Obama presidency. (Obama listed *American Spy* on his 2019 summer reading list.) The failure of his administration to push for bold agendas on issues like the racial wealth gap and mass incarceration spurred conversations about the limits of representation and neoliberal uses of identity. The logic of working from within systems to change them has been further tested in recent years, both in politics and culture. In the case of Senator Kamala Harris, the symbolic relevance of a black woman running for president was undermined by her record of tough-on-crime policies that disproportionately targeted poor minority communities. Films like Spike Lee's *BlacKKKlansman* and Marvel's *Black Panther*, which depict black protagonists cooperating with, if not working for, American intelligence agencies and law enforcement, brought this issue to the fore yet again. Critics like Boots Riley, the director of *Sorry to Bother You*, pushed back against Lee in particular, arguing that racial justice could not be won simply by diversifying organizations, like the police, that have historically perpetuated racial violence. "To the extent that people of color deal with actual physical attacks and terrorizing due to racism and racist doctrines," Riley argued, "we deal with it mostly from the police on a day to day basis. And not just from White cops. From Black cops too."

Wilkinson recognizes this danger as well but ultimately reserves her judgment, presenting the ethical choices faced by Marie as far murkier and more difficult to resolve, complicated by the multiplicity of allegiances that arise in a person's lifetime. At its heart, *American Spy* is a refreshing take on identity that utilizes the tool kit of spy fiction to remind us of how wily a thing it is—for spies but for the rest of us, too. Marie is many things to many people, even when she is not undercover. As she shifts between Harlem, Martinique, and Burkina Faso, her identity shifts as well: "In the United States I thought of myself as black before I thought of myself as American. In Ouagadougou, routinely, those designations were reversed." But unlike many of its predecessors, which score these shifts in identity primarily in a tragic key, *American Spy* tells the story of a fractured self as one that can be the basis for possibility and reinvention. If an agent is the sum total of her covers, then forging an identity in America is the ultimate spy thriller. ■

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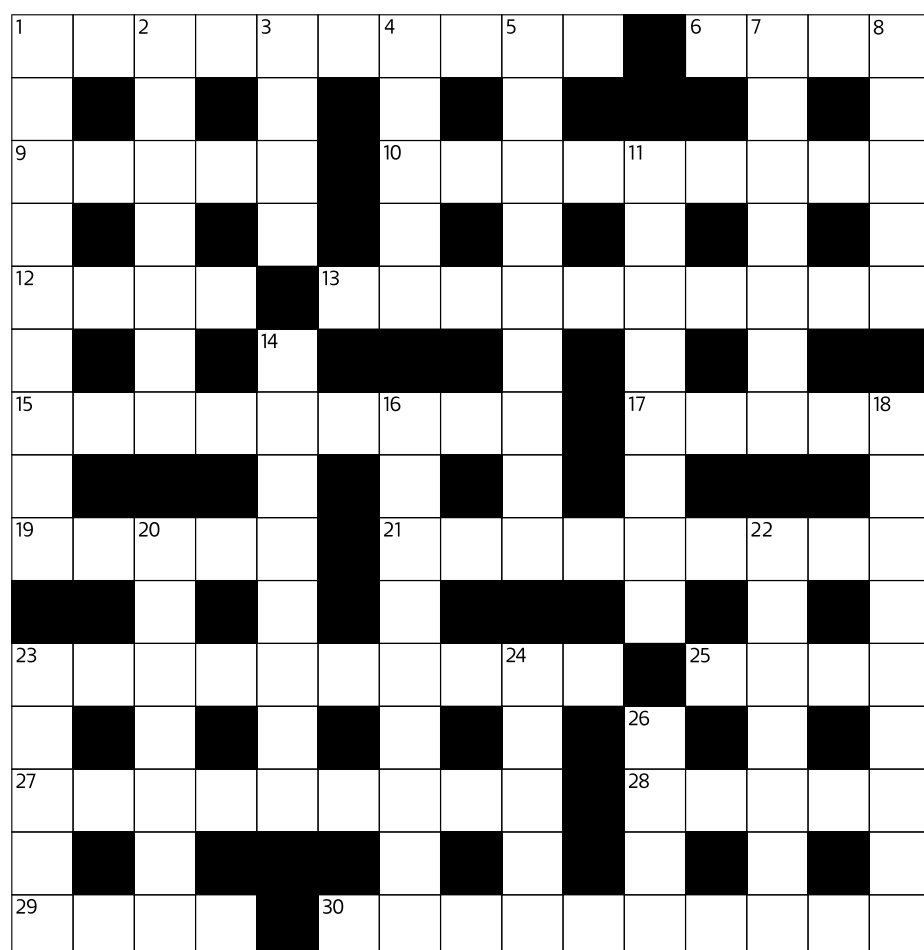


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Puzzle No. 3521

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO



ACROSS

- 1 Song about law and a member of Congress, to friends (10)
 6 Three or four found in safe workplace (1,3)
 9 Boys discussed manner of dress (5)
 10 Bury a bit of legal income outside, showing a certain kind of skill (9)
 12 Biblical scribe's last letter in time (4)
 13 23A prepared a takeoff? (10)
 15 Stopspayingattention (6,3)
 17 Speaker's ball coming back in ocean ridges (5)
 19 Once again televise red, mysterious rune (5)
 21 Scientific finC/Ying (9)
 23 Records attempts for heavy fabrics (10)
 25 Island we named for a bird (4)
 27 Fearless guards start to look, and find tattered mask (9)
 28 Body part is exceedingly tough on the exterior (5)

- 29 Once, in the morning, it could be administered orally? (4)
 30 Gruesome, morbid eye telling tall tales? (10)

DOWN

- 1 Uncontrolled heap of gross rage! (9)
 2 Raise flag over mostly genuine country (7)
 3 Alpha males, getting the last word? (4)
 4 Best editor elevated magazine, e.g. (5)
 5 Possessed by Infiniti, a Tesla starts up (9)
 7 In speech, make alcoholic beverage available to customers (3,4)
 8 Decline to take final in astronomy with Bruce (5)
 11 Side treat confused child (5,3)
 14 Like Rudolph Valentino at heart, applied more medication externally (3-5)
 16 Alternatively, Mister Rogers seen from below, clutching operator's paperwork (5,4)
 18 Fashionably messy home, with Tomlin keeping quiet (9)
 20 Copy extraordinary lip care (7)
 22 "Mince Pies": poem that's part of a series (7)
 23 Postpone beginning of talks on return of Italian territory (5)
 24 Senior's tree (5)
 26 Alternately, left audio in case (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3520

ACROSS 1 anag. 6 B + RAG
 10 [t]UNIC + [w]ORN 11 anag.
 12 HO(O)VER + DAM 14 "sales"
 15 rev. 17 WEDNES (anag.) + DAY
 20 hidden 22 2 defs. 25 FILT (anag.) + H
 26 ANG + K OR W + AT 28 REV IS IT
 29 anag. 30 "hair" 31 JOU(RN + AL)IST

DOWN 1 Y(OUT)HS (shy rev.)
 2 NOIS(OM)E (MO rev.) 3 EPOD (rev.) + E
 4 & 29 CON + CUR 5 anag.
 7 REB + [g]UILD 8 GL(ASSEY)E (leg anag., essay anag.) 9 E.G. + GS + HELL
 13 DOW'S + E 16 PUR(CHA[i])SE
 18 DO(RA)G (god rev.)
 19 P(U)T + FO[u]RTH 21 rev.
 23 KU (rev.) + WAIT + I 24 anag.
 26 anag. 27 O + MAH A (a ham rev.)



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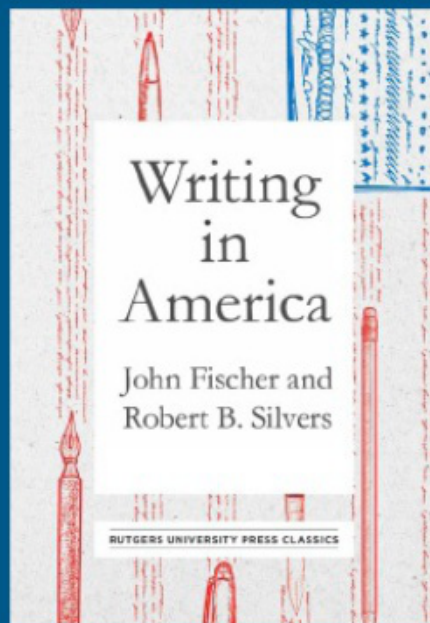
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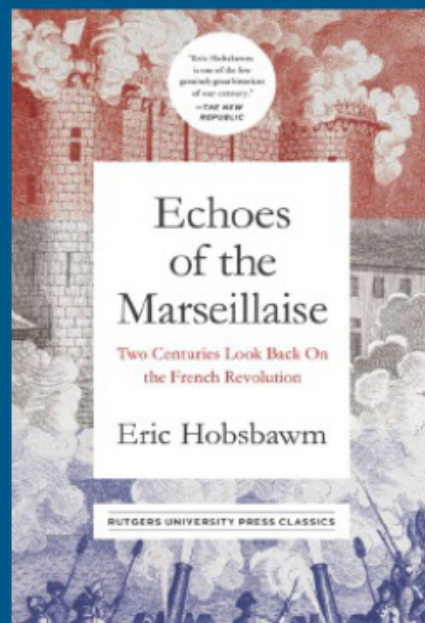
"Fascinating...entertaining...a retrospect of ingenious and often sardonic erudition."
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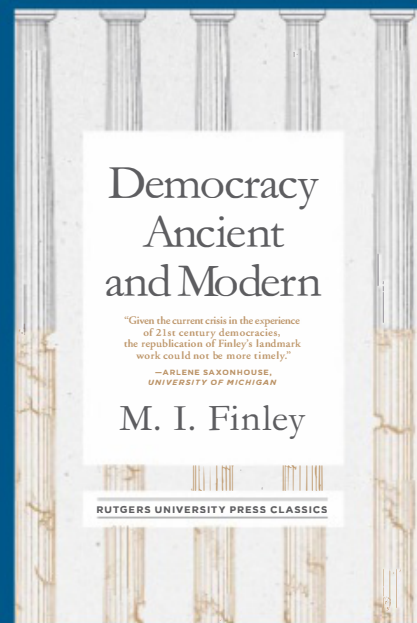
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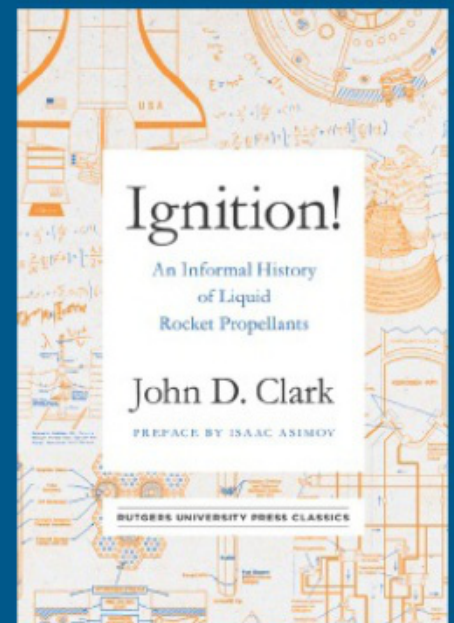
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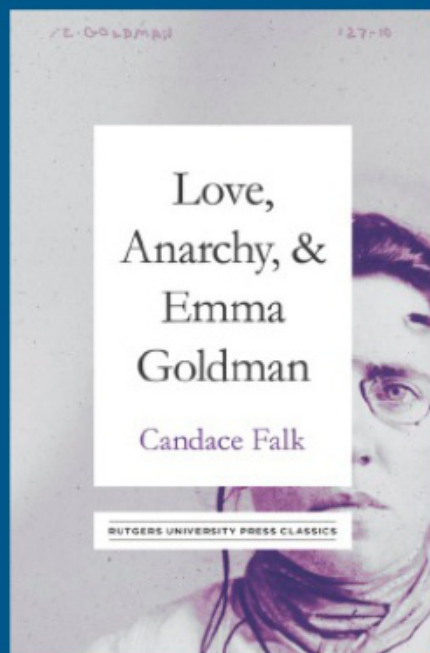
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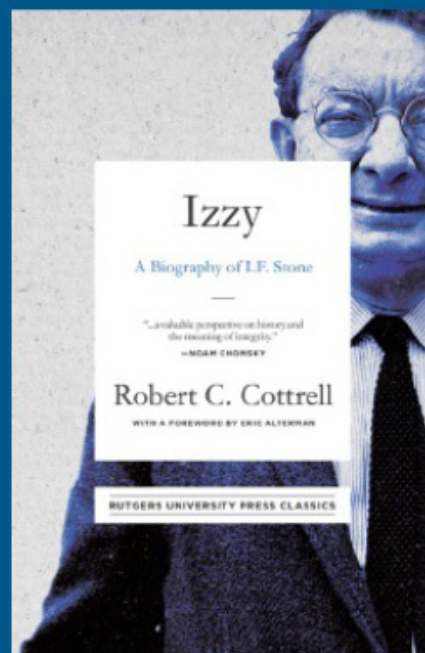
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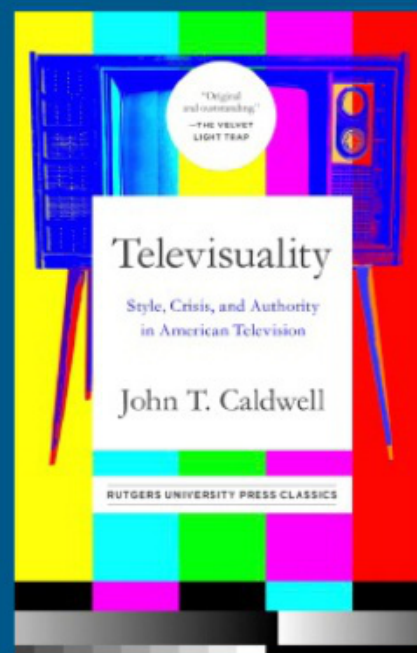
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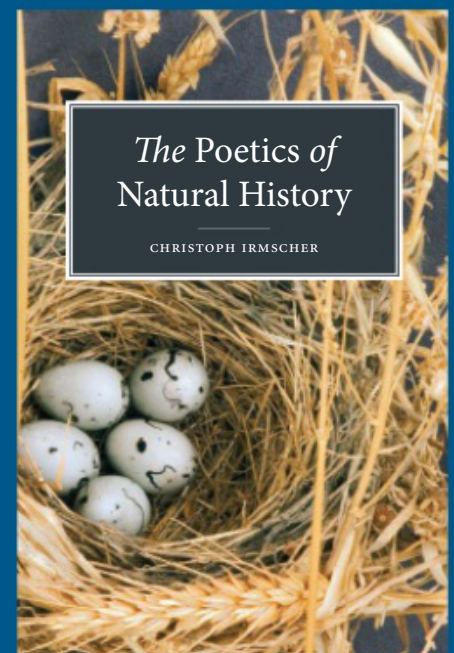
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